



Agrotourism - A Sustainable Development for Rural Area of Korca

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Abstract:

The term agro-tourism emerged in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms that are related to tourism. This notion represents all activities related not only to tourists but also to the organizers of the holidays in general. Agro tourism is very important for rural communities as well as urban areas. It can provide several advantages: income, employment, use accommodation, activities, natural resource conservation, recreation and education. But the main problem for many countries is the low level of farm income. Agro tourism intends to obtain higher standards of living for rural communities especially through increased income for people who work in agriculture.

There are five main forms of rural tourism which bring benefits both for tourists and for the local community.

- Natural tourism, which is mainly preferred for its recreational value.*
- Cultural tourism, which is mainly related to culture, history and archeology of the area destination.*
- Ecotourism, as a form of tourism that presents natural resources while maintaining the values and local population welfare.*
- Village tourism, where visitors live and enjoy the various activities of peasant life.*
- Agro tourism, in which tourists see and participate in traditional agricultural practices without destroying the ecosystems, the host bases.*

Development in Korca region is one of the main priorities of the regional strategy. The study will be focused on four villages: Dardhe, Voskopoja, Vithkuq and Prespa. We will see the advantages and weaknesses of rural tourism development in these areas, as well as

their benefits. We will also see a study about the residents' perceptions of the tourism development in the area and of the agro-touristic behavior of the tourists there.

Key words: agro tourism, impacts, regional development, rural tourism.

JEL Classification: O13, Q13, Q26

Introduction

1. Terms and Trends of Agro Tourism

The term agro-tourism emerged in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms that are related to tourism. This notion represents all activities related not only to tourists but also to the organizers of the holidays in general. For this reason, agro tourism is understood differently by tourists, on the one hand, and by other groups related to tourism, on the other. For tourists, agro tourism means all activities through which people learn about the agricultural production or the regular stay in the farm environment.

Practice shows that there are other entities interested in the agro touristic activity, while firms are focusing their activity less and less on agriculture. The meaning of 'agro tourism' varies among different geographical regions. Furthermore the links between agriculture and rural tourism vary, this difference being due to the role of the community in these areas.

In Europe the difference between agro tourism and rural tourism is critical. In areas where farm production is highly specialized and where one can notice the existence of close links in the rural community, it is advisable to use the term rural tourism instead of agro tourism. In broad terms agro tourism also includes services related to food production companies according to tradition. This aspect of agro tourism is crucial for the rural product promotion in countries with high levels of food production. So agro tourism includes agricultural, social and economic policies in the EU, and it is defined as the

economic multidimensional development of agricultural farms and multidimensional development of rural areas. Being an example of extra development of agricultural and rural areas, nowadays agro tourism includes extensive knowledge in the fields of economics, marketing and management.

Agro tourism is very important for rural communities as well as for urban areas. It can provide several advantages: income, employment, use accommodation, activities, natural resource conservation, recreation and education.

One of the main problems for many countries is the low level of farm income. Agro tourism intends to obtain higher standards of living for rural communities especially through increased income for people who work in agriculture. For this it uses various financial and agricultural policies. In many countries, agricultural farm income is almost equal to the average.

There are many cases when farmers cover two sectors at the same time, providing two sources of income. The reason of initiating various activities is that the income from agriculture is not enough and the labor force appears to be high. Changes in employment and income sources affect the reduction in the number of farmers who work part-time. This phenomenon is seen more in Southern European countries where more than 50% of the employees work part-time.

Agricultural supply in Europe is very abundant as farms, farmers and their production companies pay attention to finding additional sources of revenue from services provided to tourists. Keeping tourists who spend weekends in these areas is very important for the European countries, the success of the agricultural activity depending on the quality of services and their compliance with the conditions and requirements of the tourists.

According to the WTO, service quality in tourism is meeting all customer requirements regarding the price, the sets guaranteed by law, the observance of safety and hygiene and harmony with the natural environment. The main instrument of the quality assessment is assertiveness and standardization of agricultural production and rural tourism.

Many specialists and tourists visit the typical agricultural farms. The purpose of these visits is to review the

use of modern technology in these farms for farm production and compare these with those of other countries. Farmers cherish even wildlife in specific parks as a special attraction for tourists. Main group agro tourism functions are: social-psychologic, economic and environmental

2. Perspectives and Trends of Agro Tourism

Agro tourism is often defined as part of the Ecotourism for both are related and subject to natural attractions. Both are described as forms with a rapid development of tourism. These forms are more marked in developed countries, conducting as models of potential development of natural resources and economic support of local society.

In the past agro touristic attractions were natural sights and plantations but the new agro tourism concept involves a system bringing together the tourism sector and the agricultural sector as a model of regional development.

Most policy makers think that tourism is a business perspective. WTO predicts that international tourist arrivals will increase from year to year, from 1 billion tourists in 2010 to 1.6 billion people in 2020.

Various scholars emphasize that the motivations of tourists to visit destinations have changed dramatically and now tourists are more interested in specific things, enthusiastic activities and, most importantly, in the quality experience of touristic products and services.

Moreover rural tourism today is the trend in Europe. Rural tourism growth is 3 times greater than the increase in tourism in general. WTO estimates an increase of 6% per annum against the growth of 2% tourism in general. According to experts, the market today has increased tourist interest in activities related to nature and culture.

Increasing tourism demand is today an important source of income for rural farmers. Their touristic products are often complex and include a number of activities and facilities. Touristic product usually coincides with the level of business. In many countries agro tourism grows quickly when tourists seek to gain experience in activities that vary from everyday life and places they have visited before.

Normally tourists travel to certain destinations to escape from stress, phones, traffic, etc. Especially parents are more interested to travel in order to please their children. Widespread is also the idea of family travel to a destination to spend a few days together and to visit farms, vineyards or wineries, to participate in productive activities of agricultural products.

3. Philosophy of Agro tourism

Agro tourism philosophy aims to increase farmers' incomes and the quality of life of rural society. Through this there are presented new opportunities for education in agriculture society and ecosystems. Therefore, the development of agro-tourism will provide the opportunity for local farmers to increase income and lifestyle.

According to some opinions, agro tourism educates people and society about agriculture and contributes to the local economy; it reduces the level of urbanization as people work and earn more from agro tourism; it promotes local products and create added value through direct marketing and stimulates economic activities in order to increase benefits in societies where the agro tourism is developed.

Researcher Rilla clearly describes the reasons for the development of agro-tourism as: educate deliberately by maintaining links between sectors interested in the local society and visitors; the positive impact on improving the health of visitors; creating relaxation; it constitutes an adventure; it determines enjoying natural food; it could be a unique experience and it is a form of leisure tourism.

3.1. Agro tourism, Tourism towards Sustainability

Although rural tourism and agro tourism are often seen as the same terms, they have their settings that differ from each other. While rural tourism is a general term, agro tourism refers to specific activities addressing leisure, organized by farmers, for different visitors. These tourist services serve as additional sources of income for farmers.

Generally agro tourism features are: it includes separate accommodations at the farmers' homes; it includes activities

related to maintained family traditions and customs; it allows visitors to have a comfortable stay away from noise, experiencing the people's friendship and the tranquility of nature.

Agro tourism is more than just a tourist product as it includes many services that accompany the product. It is a way of understanding the journey as a new sensation or positive behavior in relation to the environment, the community and their culture. Agro tourism is a leisure activity and it is very successful. The possibility of enjoying the rural environment and culture extends to these different markets of tourists attractions.

Agro-tourism tourists travel with family and usually come from urban areas. They show respect for the customs of the rural areas and seek information about the places they intend to visit. Agro touristic services are not for mass tourism. In addition to the benefits from accommodation, catering and other activities or direct selling, agro tourism also brings other benefits such as: recognition and assessment of architectural and cultural heritage.

Thus agricultural environment is not only the manufacturer of concrete goods, but also of intangible goods, especially those relating to culture, education, food, landscapes and environment. Thus to determine the development of agro-tourism, a careful analysis should be conducted, a SWOT analysis which highlights opportunities, weaknesses, strengths and limitations.

3.2 The SWOT analysis includes:

Strong points: development of powerful agro-tourism; involvement of different ways of life and traditions; high quality service, peace and security activities.

Weaknesses: Lack of training; lack of legislation regarding the agro-tourism; lack of additional supply; the high cost of accommodation and restoration.

Opportunities: Promoting the preservation of customs and local traditions; new opportunities for employment in rural areas; alternative markets for local products.

Restrictions: lack of planning and concrete goals; the risk of massiveness; low political awareness.

4. The Economic effects of Agro tourism in Rural Areas

All models of touristic development share dilemmas as to their positive and negative effects. Development of agro tourism in many destinations is viewed positively as an opportunity for local communities to invest, to increase revenues and responsibilities, to protect the environment. Agro tourism generates significant contributions to the process of rural development. Contributions may be in the form of: revenue growth, access to work, exchanges between rural and urban areas, multiplier effects on direct investment, strengthening the local structure through working groups, stimulating the development of physical infrastructure, the diversification of economic activities, increase the value of properties in an area, creating a ready infrastructure, create opportunities for other economic developments.

Negative effects of agro touristic development occur when this development violates ethical principles. Potential adverse effects are mainly related to environmental degradation and the loss of local cultural qualities.

5. Development of Agro Tourism in the Korca Region

Korca is the largest city of the region, founded in the 15th century. Agro tourism as one of the priority sectors for economic development in the Korca region has been facing an increase in the past recent years. Over 50 families from the villages of Dardha, Voskopoja, Vithkuq and Liqenas operate agrotourism, based on the French model, which is constantly improving the conditions of the farmers of Korca. Restaurant type farms, farm and hotel restaurant, open farms, farms for parking and specialized ones, have begun to expand their activities in the region's picturesque villages and thus to attract more tourists, mostly foreigners.

Agrotourism is one of the priority sectors for economic development in the Korca region. Families awaiting tourists,

local or foreign, already have regular activities in Dardha, Voskopoja (which are most frequented), as well as in Vithkuq and Liqenas. The latter has received German investments for the development of family tourism. The desire of families to increase their economic income has encouraged investing in improving the conditions of accommodation, leisure, entertainment, food and especially vacationers. The Korca region still cannot boast itself with a good development for special farms that practice sports holiday, mountaineering, hunting, fishing or riding. The publication of guides of Dardha, Voskopoja and Liqenas will probably serve as a gate for entering a new phase. The development of the Korca region is also one of the main priorities of the regional strategy. The study focuses here on four villages, Dardhe, Voskopoje, Vithkuq and Prespa.

5.1. Swot Analysis

Korca Region tourism sector offers the following opportunities: attractive hilly - mountains landscapes, two great lakes (Big Prespa -Small Prespa), a healthy climate, mineral water (Dardhe - Vithkuq). Agrotourism offers: cultural and historical places of interest (seven churches in Voskopoja, dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, others in Vithkuqi), potential for sport activities (ski village of Dardha, Voskopoja, the Prespa fishing, climbing, parachute jumping), traditional cultural and religious events, handicrafts, works of wood and stone made by hands, typical dishes (Voskopoje, Dardhe, Vithkuq, Liqenas)

The threats and vulnerabilities present in the region of Korca as an obstacle to the development of tourism in the region: the cutting and damages to forests, the irregular constructions, the uncontrolled hunting that has damaged flora and fauna, the use of dynamite in Lake of Prespa, the competition with neighboring countries to improve standards, the infrastructure in tourist areas, the development of rural tourism in the region is not at the standards offered by the neighboring countries, the limited number of characteristic restaurants, the lack of regular transportation lines in tourism priority areas, but only on holidays.

Opportunities for the tourism potential in the region: the orientation to weekend visits, several-day tours around the

region, development of special interest tourism (national parks), excursion to particular historical, cultural, archaeological places of interest to, potential for development of rural tourism and ecotourism forms (accommodation of tourists in the houses of villagers), ongoing improvement of the snow tourism, special interest tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, further development of family tourism and hotel activities of full package type, revitalization of parks and population of the forests with wild animals specific to these areas.

5.2 Results

Table1. Socio-economic profile of the sample.

	VARIABLE	FREQUENCY		VARIABLE	FREQUENCY %
AGE	Under 20 years	16	EDUCATION	Primary	0
	21-35 years	26		Secondary school	18
	36-45 years	40		High school degree	14
	46-60 years	18		University graduated	68
	Over 60 years	0		ORIGIN	Inbound
MARITAL STATUS	Single	24	Outbound		42
	Married without children	36	INCOMING	160 000-200 000	8
Married with children	40	205 000-300 000		12	
EMPLOYMENT	Employed	52		305 000-400 000	42
	Self-employed	16	400 000-600 000	16	
	Unemployed	2	Over 600	22	

			000	
Student	6	GENDER	Female	46
Retired	4		Male	54

Source: the authors.

Questionnaires for tourists

The profile of tourists coming to the area is as follows: mostly are aged between 21 and 45 years old, employed, with university level of education (due to the fact that it is the type of tourism that requires a certain level of education), foreign and domestic tourists, earning over 300 000 lek. This is because agrotourism requires considerable income. These tourists are coming mostly with their families (with or without children), and only 1/5 of them are single.

According to the study, 56% of the tourists in the sample have visited these areas 2-5 times (fig.1). This shows that the interest for this area is growing more and more, tourists seeking to return. The challenge, however, is if they will return more often. This will be possible only if they find something to do, which means that there should be an increase in the range of the offer, and an insistence on the intrapersonal relations of the inhabitants with the tourists. Otherwise these tourists will not continue to come repeatedly. (Fig. 1)

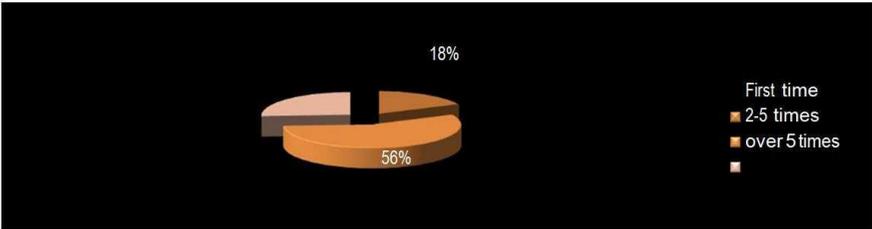


FIGURE 1. Tourist visiting frequency

Although the number of visiting tourists is growing, unfortunately, this does not apply to the duration of the stay. It is not too long, only 2-5 nights. (Fig. 2)

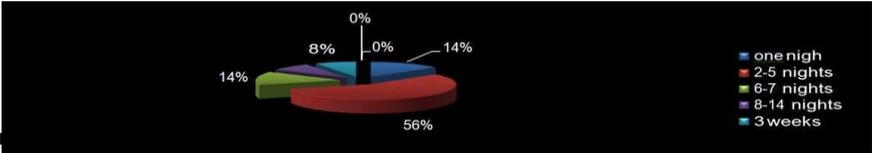


FIGURE 2. The duration of tourists' staying

Together with those who stay 6-7 nights, it gets to an average of 70%. So agrotourist vacations in this area last just a week. Only 8% spend 2 weeks, and 8% - 3 weeks. This is because the area does not offer many activities and entertainment for the tourists. The most visited areas in the region are Voskopoja, followed by Dardha, Liqenasi and Vithkuqi. (These are villages that are located near the town of Korca, traditionally known as touristic villages). However, this data should be complemented by the duration of stay in these villages to get a full view. This happens because these villages have different touristic profiles, which results in the various durations of the stay.

The main reasons for the touristic visit are participation in environmental activities as well as familiarity with the beauty and traditions of the area. Also, another strong reason is the tranquility they hope to find in the countryside. (Fig.3)

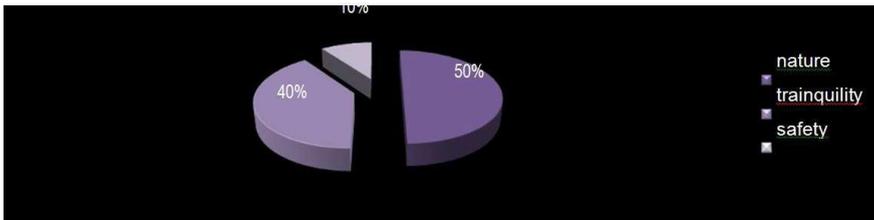


FIGURE 3. Reasons for tourists' choosing the region.

Most of the tourists use the accommodation in the rented homes offered by the residents of these villages. As regards the attitude of the tourists toward the environment, tourists in their majority claim to care for the environment. A significant part, however, acknowledges that it happened to be occasionally. A very small part declares that the environmental protection is not their objective. (Fig. 4)

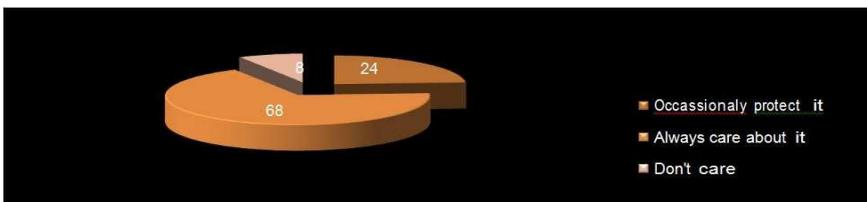


FIGURE 4. Attitude of tourists toward environment

Questionnaires for residents

For a large part of the residents (93%) the development of tourism provides income for the community and increases the possibility of raising the standard of living for the residents of these areas. Only 7% think that the impact of tourism in the economy is neutral. According to their opinions, the impact of tourism in the economy is strong, and a significant part think that the impact is medium (Fig. 5).

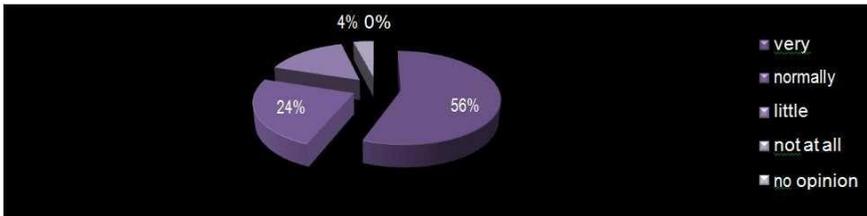


FIGURE 5. Impact of tourism to the economy of the region

They claimed that agro tourism is the most suitable for the development of these areas. This form of tourism can be developed better in the rural areas of our country due to the special natural values, its attractive power, the availability of host community and the increased interest, from both the local power and the other stakeholders in the tourism industry.

But besides displayed interest, a close cooperation between the public and private sector is needed. This would bring about the rise of superstructure and infrastructure necessary for the reception of tourist flows. Currently in these rural areas there are about 70 rental houses which provide accommodation for tourists mostly during the summer and winter periods. Most of them have only one room to rent which means that the host structures are small, undeveloped, and not professional. (Fig.6)

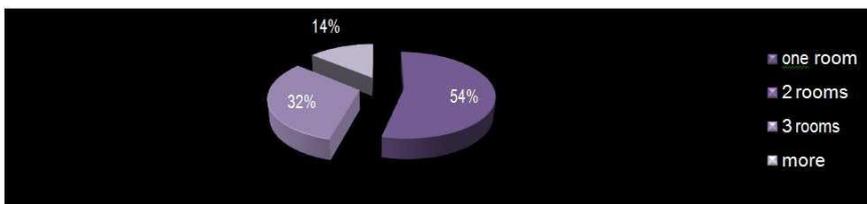


FIGURE 6. Number of rooms available per house for tourists.

Despite all the efforts of residents there is still a lack of appropriate environments to achieve maximum satisfaction in tourists. From the answers given by the owners of these homes there can be drawn the conclusion that they feel a lack of experience in terms of ensuring the most appropriate the accommodation. They claim that they can ensure investment but they are not convinced it is this form of appropriate accommodation that the agro tourists are seeking.

So there must be undertaken a training program related to the recognition of agrotourists' requirements and ways furnishing accommodation facilities.

Another problem is the seasonality. Almost half of the demand is concentrated in the summer, while the other half is divided between winter and spring, autumn being negligible. This leads to a lack of capacity in summer and very high prices, a surplus offer in fall, and as result - minimum prices. The challenge is to increase the touristic demand in autumn. An attractive slogan will be 'after the hot summer holidays, come to the freshness at our village". But this would not apply to families with children that start school at this period, what remains being the elderly, and people with special interests. The former have frequented the village in the summer. Challenge in the autumn is the weather, which is rainy, and this makes it difficult for many activities. So the activities should be carried out in closed environments or it will be related to weekend tourism, in nearby markets, such as the districts near Korca, or from neighbor countries.

Conclusions

Relying on the SWOT analysis we understand that the policy makers of the region have to concentrate their efforts on:

- Solving problems of infrastructure, water and energy;
- Attracting foreign investors or various associations for the expansion of the road network;
- Clearly defining rules for private buildings used for tourist purposes;
- Restoration of existing rural infrastructure.

- Professional promoting of destinations, intertwined types of tourism, enabling different tourist attractions.
- Drafting and distribution guidebooks to their potential customers;
- The establishment of Web-site presenting all the potentials offered by rural areas;
- Promotion through the media on the eve of every tourist season;
- Including the destination in professional packages of tour operators;
- Product orientation towards the market demand (trying to understand better the market).
- Improving service quality
- Professional training of farmers applying agrotourism in rural areas. The training can be carried out by non-governmental organizations.

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