

SOCIO-CULTURAL EFFECTS OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON THE HOST COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Many of the tourist destinations are affected in several aspects by the development of tourism, including the socio-cultural one. The present work aims, based on a review of the literature of concern, to present the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the rural area and to determine how the consequences are perceived by the local community. The most frequent social and cultural effects generated by tourist activities carried out in rural areas involve items related to: the interaction between tourists and residents; quality of life and local cultural activities (crafts, music, art, traditions); ethnic and cultural identity of the host community; quality of public services and general infrastructure; recreational opportunities and facilities. Towards the development of rural tourism, residents generally have a favorable attitude and are aware of the social and cultural benefits to their community. The specialized literature highlights that the impact induced by tourism in the socio-cultural environment, can be positive, as well as negative. In the most cases, residents believe that the advantages brought by tourism for the rural community outweigh its negative impact. While some studies have found that positive non-economic (socio-cultural and environmental) impacts are considered to be more important than positive economic impacts, other researchers have concluded that economic benefits of rural tourism come first in residents' perceptions. The influence of some of the socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, level of education, dependence on tourism etc.) on the benefits perceived by the local population can differ greatly between regions or countries due to the particularities and diversity of the rural communities (customs, beliefs, local specific etc.).

Keywords: rural tourism, tourism development, socio-cultural impacts, residents' perception

Rural areas face numerous challenges that affect the wellbeing of residents and the health of the local economy. Low incomes, poor agricultural merchandise prices, lack of jobs, rural-urban migration, rudimentary infrastructure, rising production expenses, etc. have determined the rural population to seek for ways to face these challenges and to obtain financial and social stability (Yang L., 2012; Moraru R.A. *et al*, 2016). Due to the benefits it provides, tourism sector represents an important development tool that support sustainability of rural communities (Zhuang X. *et al.*, 2019; López-Sanz J.M. *et al*, 2021). But the development and improper management of tourist activities in the rural environment could have unwanted effects, such as the influence of tourists on local culture and on "the way of life" of residents (Tiraieyari N. and Hamzah A., 2012; Bello F.G. *et al*, 2017).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper intended to explore the socio-cultural impacts of tourism development in rural areas. Therefore, the authors reviewed the literature on rural tourism on the state of the questions of sustainable development, rural development, impacts of rural tourism and agritourism, rural residents' attitude towards tourism, perceived consequences of tourism development. Data retrieved from critical literature review were divided into information about the benefits and disadvantages of rural tourism in terms of socio-cultural aspects. Most studies and researches have focused on the analysis of all dimensions related to the sustainable development of rural tourism (environmental, economic and socio-cultural), and only a small part have considered only one aspect of sustainability. In order to gather the most relevant information and considering that the socio-cultural impacts are closely related to the specifics of the place and the host community, we used the conclusions of several studies conducted in very diverse rural communities located in different parts of the world.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is frequently considered that the main factor that determines rapid social and cultural changes within the host communities is represented by the development of tourism (Sharpley R. and Telfer D.J., 2002). These changes affect, among others, people's habits, social lives, daily routines, values and beliefs (Dogan H.Z., 1989). The socio-cultural impacts of tourism can be approached from different points of view, which can be mainly divided into three categories: host, tourist, tourist-host interrelationships (Wall G. and Mathieson A., 2006). The type and level of socio-cultural impacts depend on the interaction between visitors and locals as well as on the specifics of the local environment (Bello F.G. *et al*, 2017), which explains the contradictions and differences that appear between regions (Totsun C., 2002). The differences between tourists and locals in terms of their socio-cultural characteristics (basic values, religious beliefs, customs, traditions, lifestyles, behavior patterns, sense of time, dress code and attitudes towards foreigners) directly influence the extent of the socio-cultural impact generated by the development of tourism (Inskeep E., 1991).

According to Murphy P.E. (1985), tourism can be described as a socio-cultural event for its main actors: the host and the visitor. Similarly, Smith S.L.J. (1995) considered that the host-guest interaction constitutes a socio-cultural impact. The direct and indirect relations between tourists and host communities determine effects on the latter from socio-cultural aspect (Barbieri C. and Mshenga P.M., 2008). These effects have the potential to produce changes regarding the value and behavioral systems, the collective lifestyles, the norms of moral conduct, community organization and family relations (Fox M., 1977), in such a way as to affect the identity of local communities (Tangit T. *et al*, 2014).

As well as other forms of tourism, rural tourism and agritourism produce certain impacts on the local surroundings, causing various changes at the social and cultural level, both negative and positive (Table 1).

Positive socio-cultural impacts. In terms of positive socio-cultural effects of rural tourism development, some studies indicate that local communities perceive cultural benefits more favorably than social ones (Muresan, I.C. *et al*, 2016). Among the positive consequences, the specialized literature mentions most frequently: improving the standard of living and the quality of recreational facilities and services (Hanafiah M.H. *et al*, 2013; Muresan, I.C. *et al*, 2016; Escudero Gómez L.A., 2019; Muresan, I.C. *et al*, 2021);

infrastructure development (Petrović M.D. *et al*, 2017); job creation and employment opportunities for women (Ollenburg C. and Buckley R., 2007); maintaining the cultural identity (Soldić Frleta D., Đurkin Badurina J., 2019); conservation of local heritage and revitalization of local cultural practices (Mbaiwa J.E., 2005; Andereck K. *et al*, 2007; Zaei M.E., 2013).

Table 1
Potential socio-cultural impacts of agritourism on host community (after Petrović M.D. *et al*, 2017)

Positive social impacts	Positive cultural impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creates favorable image of the countryside - Provides recreational facilities for residents, as well as tourists - Facilitates the process of modernization - Provides opportunities for additional education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages pride in local arts, crafts and cultural expression - Preserves cultural heritage
Negative social impacts	Negative cultural impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creates resentment and antagonism related to dramatic differences in wealth - Invites moral degradation resulting in increasing crime, prostitution, social conflicts, etc. - Causes conflicts in traditional societies and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of spiritual and cultural sense due to excessive global commercialization of products - Abandonment of indigenous culture and adapting to modern, generally accepted parameters

Not only tourism entrepreneurs and local communities benefit from rural and agri-tourism, but also the visitors. They have suitable occasions to enjoy leisure and recreation opportunities as well as educational benefits: to be close to the rural lifestyle (Tiraieyari N. and Hamzah A., 2012); knowledge about agriculture, ecology and the environment (Bello F.G. *et al*, 2017); information on food safety and healthy food, etc. (Sharpley R. and Telfer D.J., 2002). Rural tourism is a real tool for educating tourists about the economic and cultural values of the local community (Barbieri C. and Mshenga P.M., 2008; Schilling B. *et al*, 2012).

Agritourism and rural tourism contributes not only to maintaining the cultural identity of rural residents, but also to increasing opportunities for social contact and the possibilities to enhance the visibility and pride of the community (López-Sanz J.M. *et al*, 2021). At the same time, it ensures the conditions to raise the quality of their life and for maintaining a lifestyle involved in agricultural production (Barbieri și Mshenga, 2008; Schilling B. *et al*, 2012). Additional benefits like new jobs, alternative incomes, infrastructure improvement, etc. would contribute to preventing the depopulation of rural areas (Ryu K. *et al*, 2020; López-Sanz J.M. *et al*, 2021) and to the youth's determination to continue working on their parents' farms (Ollenburg C. and Buckley R., 2007). Yang L. (2012) reported that following the development of agritourism, more investments were attracted at

the local level and the living standards of the locals were improved (better sanitation, modernization of roads, etc.).

Negative socio-cultural impacts. The impact of tourism on the tourist destination can also be unfavorable, this being highlighted by research on the attitude of residents towards tourism (Tangit T. *et al*, 2014). Numerous studies have confirmed that the development of tourism in rural communities has the potential to produce unwanted socio-cultural consequences, represented especially by cultural decline, changes in behavior and traditional values, decrease in living standards, loss of some customs and the adoption of others, etc. (Li J. *et al*, 2018; Zhuang X. *et al*, 2019 Muresan I.C. *et al*, 2021). According to Doxey V. (1975), as tourism develops in a certain area and the number of tourists increases, a state of irritation can manifest itself more and more strongly within the local community, expressing certain incompatibilities between the guests and hosts. Therefore, in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the unpleasant effects for the host community, a continuous monitoring of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism (Faulkner B. and Tideswell C., 1997) and a responsible tourism planning are necessary (Brunt P. and Courtney P., 1999). The study by Pearce P.L. (1990) in New Zealand shows that the development of agritourism could induce, against the background of cultural differences, a confrontation between tourists and the local community. The same thing is also supported by the research on agritourism in Turkey carried out by Karabati S. *et al* (2009), which shows that between residents and tourists from different cultures differences may appear related to religious and political beliefs and cultural customs. On the other hand, the development of tourism in rural areas gives rise to some social problems like prostitution, excessive consumption of alcohol, various crimes, gambling, etc. (Petrović M.D. *et al*, 2017). These determine unpleasant implications on local beliefs, customs, and on the traditional culture of the host communities (Nunkoo R. and Ramkissoon H., 2011), in some cases even resulting in the triggering of an acculturation process (Weaver D.B. and Lawton L., 2001). These statements are in line with the study by Shaffril H.A.M *et al* (2015) carried out in Malaysia, which confirms that agritourism activities have the potential to lead to the alteration of order and social security and the culture of local communities by generating problems determined by excessive alcohol consumption, drugs or criminal actions such as theft. However, even if rural residents are aware of the negative effects, generally they consider that the advantages

outweigh the inconveniences generated by the development of tourist activities in their community (Eraqi M.I., 2007).

Analyzing the attitude of Vietnamese rural locals towards the development of tourism, Pham L. and Kayat K. (2011) concluded that non-economic benefits seem to be more important for the residents than the economic advantages, dar McGehee N.G. and Andereck K.L. (2004) argue that the opposite also exists. Also, other studies emphasized the importance of social and cultural aspects for the development of rural tourism (Bello F.G. *et al*, 2017; Muresan I.C. *et al*, 2021). At the same time, it seems that the local residents' perception and attitude towards tourism is influenced by the level of development of the host community (Choi H.C. and Murray I., 2010), as well as by some of their socio-demographic characteristics (Muresan I.C. *et al*, 2016; Bello F.G. *et al*, 2017). Thus, the local female population appreciates more the cultural benefits, while the younger ones are more excited about the improvements in recreational facilities and those related to social life (Wang Y. and Pfister R.E., 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

Tourist activities in rural areas produce certain impacts and various changes at the social and cultural level. Rural residents support the tourism activity even if they also perceive some negative effects in addition to the benefits, because they believe that the positive impact is stronger than the negative one. The influence of some of the socio-demographic characteristics on the benefits perceived by the local population can differ greatly between regions or countries due to the particularities and diversity of the rural communities.

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