



The role of rural tourism for poverty alleviation and rural community development

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Rural tourism can be envisaged as contributing to economic and social development of local communities, by including tourism policies, as well as specific programs and projects that aim at the reduction of poverty levels. Based on the analysis of a series of different country experiences, our paper emphasizes that, from the host community's point of view, essential goals of tourism development must include generating higher levels of income, creating new employment opportunities, and increasing foreign exchange flows. Equally important, any such development must also protect the environment and especially the local culture, to which tourists are attracted in the first place. This is why the potential of rural tourism in local communities should be a central consideration in discussions on policies regarding poverty alleviation. An associated challenge is how to ensure that the local communities retain their "authentic" character to ensure sustainable long-term success without becoming too dependant on tourism but yet still benefit enough economically to make it worthwhile. Throughout the analysis, we find that tourism is a potent force that is intimately intertwined with rural issues throughout the world and has had a dramatic impact most notably in developing countries. But, rural tourism, though a powerful tool for economic development and heritage sustainability, needs great care and sensitivity in planning, management and marketing to be socially as well as economically viable. The paper concludes by stating that tourism must not distort, but rather complement the local village economic which is usually based on agri-rural production.