

"Local Development" Prospects through Agritourism in Greece

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Abstract

This paper attempts to clarify the term "Local development" and link it to Agritourism. Case study is Greece during the last fifty years. Theresearchis based on the characteristics of Agritourismwhile the goal of this study is to present Agritourism's potential to be an impact factor at the local development level. An effort was made to provide practical answers to local development visions. But these answers should also be provided in economic-social terms and rules, indicating rational and sustainable development proposals at local level.

Keywords: Local Development, Agritourism, Forms Of Agritourism, Suggestions At Local Level

INTRODUCTION

Local Development is a term used by European Union in order to note that today bottom – up policies are applied to achieve development. Consequently, the future of "Local Development" is incumbent to Local Communities. The same opinion is expressed in European Commission's Guide which urges local communities to concur with the principles outlined in the programming period 2014 – 2020. Participants are local action groups with practical scientific tools and suggestions for achieving "Local Development".

As concept "Local development" means that the local population takes leading role and creates a local partnership, which plans, implements and completes a development strategy. This strategy is designed in such a way as to exploit the key strengths of the local community, on a social, environmental and economic level, instead of just diagnose problems. [1].

Based on the above, we detect today's functional tourist structures of the country, with the model of

Agritourism, in order to highlight it, bypassing the peculiarities and weaknesses of the country and especially those of "Local Communities" that emerged, due to the economic and health crisis. [2].

Greece is among the countries that has potentials for "Local Development", since it has natural wealth which includes: beautiful natural environment, globally known cultural heritage, mountains, sun, eating habits, traditional hospitality (as a legacy from "Xenius Zeus"). Due to those factors there should be support for every Local tourist destination. There should be enhancement of parameters like education, research, financing, and innovation in every level as well as the creation of a cluster. [3].

All the above mentioned explain how and why Agritourism could contribute to "Local Development". The following will discuss the needs that agritourism meets.

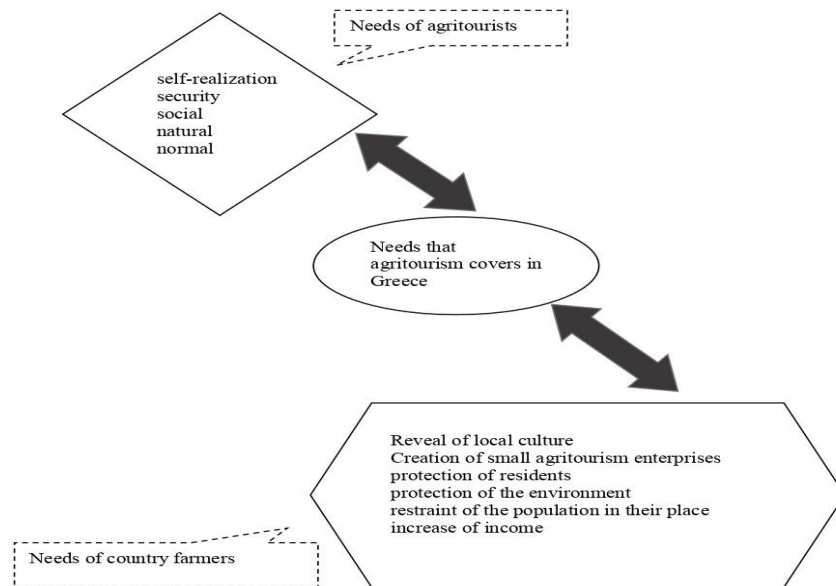


Fig 1: Agritourism contribution to “Local Development”.

Agritourism

For lexicographers: "agritourism is the organized tourist activity, which ensures to tourists, free accommodation on a farm in exchange for their participation in agricultural activities.

At the same time it is a kind of vacations which covers the need of financial survival to farmers - small landowners who have decided to follow traditional crops, without the use of pesticides and chemicals.

These products present increasing demand and the farms where they are produced provide hospitality to people who wish to live close to nature, familiarize with traditional cultivation forms and sometimes actively participate in them. And thus, farmers - land owners ensure an additional income. [4], [5].

Forms of Agritourism

Greece meets the conditions for the development of several Agritourism Forms for Local Development, due to the many and varied natural and anthropogenic comparative advantages, such as: the large residential dispersion of “traditional” mountainous and semi-mountainous settlements, which have important architectural, historical and cultural interest. Thus, there is agritourism: In mountain villages, traditional settlements, settlements in areas of special natural beauty, fishing villages, villages and farms.

Agritourism of Mountain Villages

Some of the 1,091 mountain settlements, located at an altitude of more than 800 meters, (could approach visitors looking for entertainment such as: mountaineering, hunting, walking in the woods, livestock, cheese-making, search for "aerotherapy" in the mountains - mountain health centers, "sanatoriums". Also healthy diet with walking and fitness facilities, etc. are offered. (El.wikipedia.org).

Agritourism of Traditional Villages

The mountainous and semi-mountainous traditional rural villages, with their distinctive architectural appearance and urban organization, could have such a timeless social and economic organization, that they could reach high levels of cultural development, elements that compose the "monumental ensembles". [6]. Traditional villages attract visitors who need rest and entertainment. Their monumental villages can be developed into tourist centres, and receive community funding that will be exploited carrying out restorations with absolute respect of the relevant protection legislation.

Agritourism Village in Areas of Great Natural Beauty

These villages are located at privileged nature locations: At wooded mountain sides, at biotopes, close to banks of lakes and rivers, at canyons and ravines, near waterfalls or caves, at volcanoes and fossilized forests and several nature transformations [7]. The simple houses of farmers there, are perfect attraction for

visitors. These villages are protected by the older Law 1650/1986, as parts of cultural heritage but as reassurance of ecological balance as well.

Agritourism at fish villages

Villages (that combine mountain and sea), are offering many local entertainment activities.

These simple small villages give tourist the opportunity to visit the traditional cafeterias and the tavern, enjoying the local snacks (mezes) and drinks but also and night fishing. All of these constitute important factors that attract visitors who wish to have peaceful holidays, like <<Robinsons>>, curing stress and pressure of city life.

Agritourism at "agrotouristic villages"

Agrotouristic villages that provide exclusively outdoor recreation such as horse riding, hunting, hiking, mountaineering, climbing, cycling, swimming in rivers or mountain lakes, etc. It is a bundle of agrotouristic services that started to find suitable ground in Greece and offers "bed and breakfast"[8].

Agrotourism at "farms"

Agritourism at farms is a form of agritourism that has thrived in Austria, Switzerland and Bavaria. In Greece - due to the small size of farms - this form is still at the development stage. in progress. Both, the experience and the literature lead to large farms, with large farmhouses or guesthouses for visitors / tourists. Visitors who wish to combine holidays with agricultural work (eg agricultural cultivation, tree planting, animal milking and cheese making, animal farming, forestry works, logging etc.). This is an interesting idea for Greece also, and if someone works for its fulfilment professionally, he will probably gain if only individual initiative will act totally co-ordinated and with the complete support of formal state.

Bodies that contribute to Local Development

The private sector contributes to the creation of private agricultural tourism enterprises of any legal form. Private initiative has the opportunity to take advantage of any development incentives provided by the state, through development laws (such as agritourism guesthouses, accommodations, workshops for the production of local traditional products, handicrafts, food, textiles, wood carvings, wood carvings, even the exploitation of thermal springs).

It should be noted here that there are 48 officially recognized thermal natural resources in the country. Their recognition was approved by the Ministry of Tourism. To this end, 3 more identification issues of the State Official Gazette were issued. They define the method of use, the therapeutic indications and contraindications, their physicochemical characteristics

and their ownership status (31/12/2017). It is also planned to secure the protection zones through presidential decrees, with the Thermal Springs and the financing of their infrastructure, through the NSRF according to the "Association of Municipalities of Greek Thermal Springs", which is directly involved in the process through Law 3498/2006.

EU's financing has the same direction in the context of structural programs and "implementation" of agritourism activities. Public organizations such as: Ministry of Tourism, Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, the Ministry of Transport contribute to the development of agritourism. Local Government Organizations: Municipalities, Communities are the "municipal development companies" that, among others, contribute to the same goal.

The institutional framework of Local Government Organizations provides the opportunity for cooperation between Local Associations of Municipalities and Communities and the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece. The institutional framework, although old (Law 1065/1980 and Law 1416/1984), opened favourable prospects for the development of Local Government Organizations. However, the catastrophic failure is due to the fact that the municipal and community "leaders", unfortunately, moved with an arbitrary and paternalistic logic, outside the spirit of traditional community. The result was that few healthy municipal enterprises operate smoothly for agritourism. For example, Agritourism Cooperatives despite the initial ideal declared, in practice the failed. Their initial number reached the 140. However today only five remained. However, collaborations in the local community are necessary and they are based mainly on the four innovative scientific assumptions as follows.

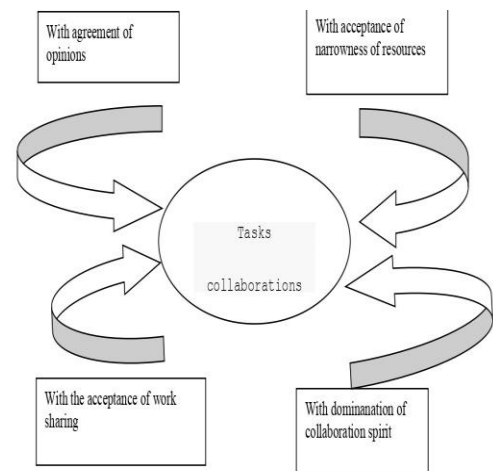


Figure 2: The four innovative scientific assumptions

Promoting of Local Development

Local communities that welcome agritourists usually provide a "bed and breakfast" as well as transportation and anything that provides local services in order to enjoy the local natural environment, culture and local history. "Poor local planning" needs to be strengthened and assess the situation based on the number of visitors as well as the approximate calculation of tourism spending.

This view, in order not to be considered quite simplistic and possibly counterproductive, some decisions should be considered. Such as: An old warehouse to be rebuilt and become a hostel, or a church gradually turned into a visitor attraction centre, or if abandoned commercial buildings turn into cafes and restaurants. All this means a change in the use of resources, but it is not what the local development demands. The type and extent of changes occurring in a rural community does not adopt the way of thinking. E.g. when the shops selling goods to the locals are being replaced by those that sell only products for tourists and, most tragically, the open places where the children of the community used to play, are turned into parking lots for visitors' cars - without alternatives.

That is why an agritourism community must properly plan its local development. That means that it must invent ways of balancing spending and profits, so that there is profit for the community from Agrotourism. Of course, the profit is not a panacea, since the human geographical environment must be protected and for this and it should be under the supervision of a body that will assess the consequences and the possibilities of maximizing positive results, for the local level.

CONCLUSION

The terms and conditions of the Greek state and the EU for the development of agritourism are clarified in our national law and in the EU Directives and Regulations. In fact, since 2003, there has been a program (Leader +) [9] that contributed to restraint the rural population in in the countryside, to promote the local community, to create and improve catering and hosteling infrastructure, with the development of agritourism, on farms, with traditional cafes, creative workcentres, handicraft, production of traditional art items, etc. Then and until today agritourism communities utilize aromatic and medicinal plants, the traditional technical places such as: winepresses, cellars, visitable wineries, game reserves focusing on highlighting the identity of the area and aiming at the protection of cultural, environmental and natural resources.

People of the Greek countryside believe that the disadvantaged communities should be turned into agritourism destinations and the Greek province should be revived. The main supporters of this idea should be

the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, the Ministry of Tourism, which have the overall responsibility for the development of Agritourism. Finally, we believe that it is useful for local communities to be informed scientifically and correctly all those involved in this effort and to promote their local economy.

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