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# RURAL TOURISM SUPPORT, SIZE AND GEOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS IMPACT ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Main purpose of this investigate what is the impact and the benefits of EU sponsorship to rural tourism Hosts. More of that is examines if the size and geographical characteristics of rural tourism host enterprises affects how positive are hosts on rural tourism development. To answer to the hypotheses a questionnaire was developed then a factor analysis was implemented to discover the most important questions to define “successful rural tourism development”. Then T-Test and ANOVA test was applied to examine if hypothesis one will be accepted or no. Our population was 652 rural tourism hosts and 174 replied giving a response rate of 27%. Findings revealed that subsidizing, size and peripheral economic condition are significantly influencing the respondents' views for and against the topic of successful rural enterprises factors. Significant differences based on size do exist in the case of skillful persons who manage well the available resources and they ensure the right management of the financial capitals.

**Keywords:** Rural Tourism, European Union, Greece, Hosts

## Introduction

Tourism in rural areas, particularly holidays on farms, in many countries has been increasing since 1970s (Anestis Fotiadis, Yeh, & Huan, 2016). Local as well as international tourists may be attracted into the countryside for a number of reasons. State funded programs targeting development of rural tourism are implemented in a large number of countries. The programs are expected to revitalize rural areas by creating new development opportunities, providing an alternative to urbanization, enhancing job creation, income growth, infrastructure development (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005). Introducing tourism into the farm requires low capital, the variable costs are often not high either, which makes host farms able to expand or contract according to the demand (Dernoi, 1983).

However, the profits generated by farm tourism are in some cases relatively small. Demand for farm tourism by the visitors is seasonal, which obviously influences farmers' incomes (Iorio & Corsale, 2010). The employment generated on the farms by letting in tourists is also seasonal and/or part-time, and mostly utilizes women's work. Additionally, this employment is often one of the lowest paid (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001). Most of the difference in expenditures is due to amounts spent on food, drink, recreation, and gifts (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002). Many of these drawbacks are counter-argued against with the suggestions to supply a broader range of services and attractions, which most likely requires government support. Additional services mid-season should

relieve the seasonality problem, reduce social isolation between seasons, and youth migration outside of the region (Pulina, Giovanna Dettori, & Paba, 2006)). The drawbacks may also be countered with an improvement of the hosts' marketing strategies, as studies show that often rural tourism service providers do not employ a sound marketing strategy (Ramanauskiene, Gargasas, & Ramanauskas, 2006). The areas that require improvements are service quality, creating a positive image of the area, organizing promotions, keeping contact with potential customers. As mentioned, all of the methods to counter the drawbacks may require state support, such as sponsoring rural educational activities for school children, establishing farming museums and libraries, investing into facilities for outdoors activities (Pulina et al., 2006). As very few countries examine this topic regarding rural tourism main scope of this study is to examine which is the impact and the benefits of EU sponsorship to rural tourism hosts. Furthermore, that it surveys if the size and geographical characteristics of rural tourism host enterprises affects how positive are hosts on rural tourism development.

## Literature review

Tourism has for a long time been considered as a potential catalyst for development of rural areas. This has become particularly important due to reduction of traditional agricultural activities in many countries (Hegarty & Przezborska, 2005; McGehee & Kim, 2004). Tourism in rural areas, particularly holidays on farms, in many countries has been increasing since 1970s. Local as well as international tourists may be attracted into the countryside for a number of reasons. Some visitors wish to isolate themselves from the bustle and noises of the cities, which they cannot do in hotels in metropolitan areas (A. Fotiadis, Vassiliadis, & Piper, 2013; Slak Valek & Al Buainain, 2016; Slak Valek, Shaw, & Bednarik, 2014). Another factor contributing to the growth of demand for rural tourism is its relative inexpensiveness, which makes it appropriate for low income families and families with many children. The latter also benefit from the freedom of movement in the natural environment as well as exposure to traditions and ways of life in the countryside. Some travelers engage in rural tourism due to spirituality, which is not necessarily related to a belief in divine powers. Spirituality may be manifested in the need to feel one's connection with / belonging to the world. With fast paced urbanization and industrialization in many areas of the globe, rural landscape facilitates the creation of this feeling; which, along with solitude, tranquility and open space can be rejuvenating (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

On the supply side, there are a number of factors contributing to emergence of rural tourism. An important one is industrialization at the farms, which releases previously engaged labor resources (Komppula, 2014). Industrialization also leads to farms merging into larger ones, making some of their premises idle. Hence, farms diversify into rural tourism in order to use these surplus resources (Iorio & Corsale, 2010). Farmers' participation in rural tourism improves employment in the countryside and provides the participants with additional income, which has been shown to be one of the most important factors (Michalko & Fotiadis, 2006; Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001; Polo Peña, Frías Jamilena, & Rodríguez Molina, 2013)(Nickerson et al., 2001; Goa et al., 2009). A farmer's income can increase when income from agriculture drops, tourism can offset the decrease in farmers' earnings (Panyik, Costa, & Rätz, 2011). Hence, by diversifying economic structure of local communities, farm tourism makes them less vulnerable to adverse changes in market conditions. The families of the farmers may also have educational and/or emotional benefits from communication with a greater circle of acquaintances.

State funded programs targeting development of rural tourism are implemented in a large number of countries. The programs are expected to revitalize rural areas by creating new development opportunities, providing an alternative to urbanization, enhancing job creation, income growth, infrastructure development, etc. (Iorio & Corsale, 2010; Loureiro, 2014). Support of the governments involved in regulation, education, promotion, and stimulation of investments is crucial for tourism development (Christou et al., 2004; Yeh & Fotiadis, 2014; Ying & Zhou, 2007). Often small farms in rural areas don't have enough resources to promote themselves or the local community to the outside world. Government support is essential for building local attractions and creating public infrastructure. This, along with the educational programs, increases the area's accessibility and professionalism of employees of the rural tourism sector. These factors have been shown to be important for perceived quality in rural tourism, which in turn influences tourists' attitudes towards visiting rural areas (Hernandez-Maestro & Gonzalez- Benito, 2013). Hence, the government would also be advised to incorporate tourists' perception of quality in evaluation of rural development projects.

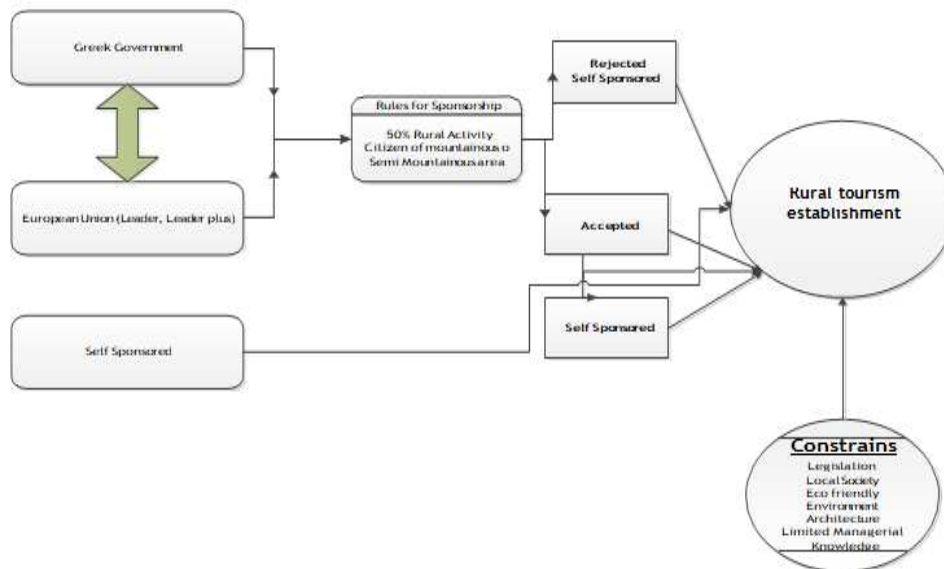
State support is also important for maintaining the environment and the community in general (e.g., keeping the areas clean and beautifying them) to make it appealing to tourists. The government

can also assist in the development of local tourism industry by providing necessary education and information to its entrepreneurs and their employees. Another important aspect of education is ensuring that the local community members are aware of the state funded programs; it has been shown that effectiveness of such programs is correlated with the awareness (Christou & Sigala, 2001; Fotiadis et al., 2016; Komppula, 2014; Wilson et al., 2001).

Often government tourism projects endeavor to preserve local cultural values, as well as to create jobs in the rural areas (Christou, 2006; Ying & Zhou, 2007). However, only large projects succeed in increasing employment substantially, since in rural tourism labor resources are usually obtained within the family. In attempts to create alternative incomes for farmers, governments subsidize investments into accommodation facilities and support other entities, such as tennis courts, landscape tours, educational facilities, exhibitions, and various workshops (A. Fotiadis, 2011). In relation to direct support of rural tourism entrepreneurs, some researchers raise income inequality issues, arguing that government support mostly benefits the relatively wealthy farmers. Additionally, distinct authorities within the public sector may differ in their interests, as well as the extent of their involvement in development of tourism in various rural areas (Valachis et al., 2009; Rid, Ezeuduji, & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014). However, indirect programs, such as those focused on preserving the biodiversity in the area, also provide benefits to the development of rural tourism. These improve the countryside environment, provide recreational opportunities and facilities, thereby enhancing the quality of local residents' lives as well as promoting tourism. These efforts also stimulate increased investments into the development of tourism from the locals, raising the participation levels of the community (Garrod, Wornell, & Youell, 2006).

Regional issues require attention when government supported development programs are implemented, as well as other factors, such as local community, environmental friendliness, and limited managerial expertise, can affect the state's approach to tourism development and the community's appraisal thereof. These notions are reflected in the framework and the hypotheses of current research. The research considers the case of rural development in Greece, as the role of tourism in rural development may differ greatly from one country to another, hence requiring a case by case analysis. In the case of Greece there are three sources that can support someone to become rural tourism host (figure 1).

Figure 1: Rural tourism sponsoring procedures.



One source is someone to be self-sponsored and develop his own business while others are getting European programs such as Leader and Leader plus and others can get sponsorship from them government on national or local program they develop. To be sponsored there are specific rules and constrains that a host must take care for.

Based on the literature review the following hypotheses was developed:

H1. Rural tourism Hosts who receive sponsorship by EU are more positive on Rural Tourism Development or Policy Factors.

H2. The size of rural tourism host enterprise affects how positive is hosts on rural tourism development factors

H3. Geographical characteristics are affecting how positive are hosts on rural tourism development factors

## Methodology

To answer the above three hypotheses a questionnaire was developed that contains in total thirty-six questions. First part of it relates to successful rural tourism development and the second one to demographic characteristics and operational characteristics of host in Greece. Subjects in the first part examines financing tourism development, leadership, collaboration among tourism entrepreneurs and local government and community cooperation. A seven point Likert scale was used from totally disagree to totally agree.

### Sampling

Two main rural tourism organization was used for this survey: Agro SA and the Greek Network of Rural Accommodation. In these organizations 652 rural tourism hotel companies was consider as hosts. First, we contacted all of the companies by phone and informed them that they could complete a survey electronically or by regular mail. A response rate of 174 hosts or 26.69% was accomplished and it was consider appropriate for this study as host from every area in Greece was included as it can be seen in the following table 1.

Table 1: Response rate

Area	Number of Companies	%	Companies Surveyed	%
PELOPONISUS	122	18.71%	26	14.94%
EPIRUS	98	15.03%	20	11.49%
THESSALY	90	13.80%	14	8.05%
CRETE	89	13.65%	20	11.49%
MACEDONIA	86	13.19%	42	24.14%
STEREA ELLADA	73	11.20%	28	16.09%
SOUTH AEGEAN	36	5.52%	6	3.45%
IONIAN	26	3.99%	8	4.60%
THRAKI	20	3.07%	8	4.60%
NORTH AEGEAN	12	1.84%	2	1.15%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Data Analysis

As it was important to find out the meaning of “successful rural tourism development” a factor analysis was developed so we could find out which was the most important questions to define this term. Secondly hosts were separates to the one who got sponsored or no from the European Union and then T-Test was used to examine if hypothesis one will be accepted or no. Moreover we categorize hosts based on the size of their facility to large, medium and small facility. With ANOVA test we examine if the size of the facility plays an important role on successful rural tourism development. Furthermore we examine what is the economic condition for Greek Peripheries and we classify them to rich, middle class and poor peripheries and we examine with ANOVA test if Periphery economic condition affects the factors of successful rural tourism development (Figure 2).

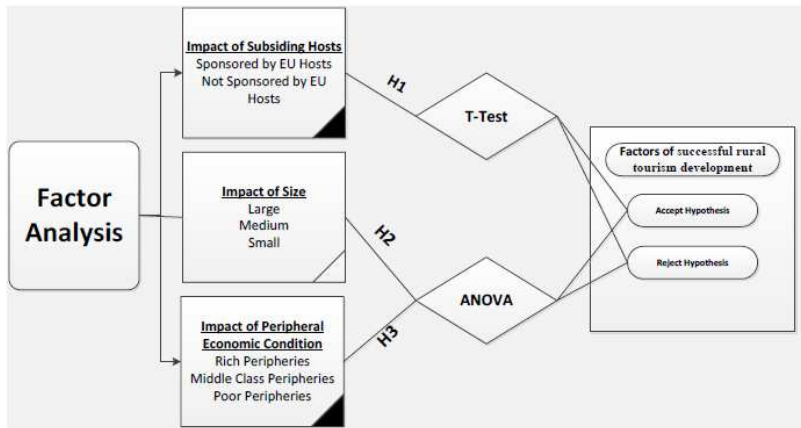


Figure 2: Research Methodology

## Results

Factor analysis was used to determine the structural relationships between statements on facilities and services for both the importance and performance measures. This involved conducting KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity followed by a principal axis factoring. The analysis revealed many coefficients of 0.3 and above in the correlation matrix with a statistical significance for the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of less than 0.000, which supports the factorability of the correlation matrix (Bartlett, 1954). Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.904 for social interaction scale exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 by a wide margin, which supports the appropriateness of the constructs used in the questionnaire (Kaiser, 1970, 1974).

Following the Kaiser rule of eigenvalues  $\geq 1$ , a four-factor solution was generated for the social interaction scale after varimax rotation which accounted for 68.4% of the total explained variance. When a solution counts for more than 50% of the total variance it is regarded acceptable (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006; Zhang, Ma, & Qu, 2012). The first factor for the social interaction scale consisted of four items which was named "Financing tourism development" as it included issues about: "Individual investors who are reinforced and supported by financing protocols (e.g. Leader, Interreg, etc)", "The local government and the market banks are coordinated and they support the individuals who invest on tourism", "The financing of works related to tourism development and promotion of the tourism product are reinforced", and "The local taxation from the local government contributes to the support of our tourism activities" For this factor, 28.76% of the total variance was explained. The second factor, with six items, was named "Leadership" as it is related to "local leadership assistant and collaboration", "local leadership needs", local leadership acceptance of collaboration", "state promotion of rural tourism", "skillful person to manage resources are important" and "collaboration to deal with shortages and problems". For this factor, 18.69% of the total variance was explained. The third factor consisted of three items and it was named "Collaboration among tourism entrepreneurs" where it is connected to "cooperation between entrepreneurs is important for success", "variety of cooperation is important for success", and "it should be a net between the regional entrepreneurs". For this factor, 10.92% of the total variance was explained. The final factor explained 10.03% of the total variance is called "Local government and community cooperation" and it consists of three items associated with "Local government aims at the development and promotion of tourism", "Local government aims at the construction and maintenance of infrastructure related to tourism", and "The local government supports us through financial capitals for the creation of tourist brochures, through actions which ensure normal road traffic and supports us by improving the landscapes of the geographic" (Table 2). All items were extracted with a factor loading higher than 0.5 (Kayat & Hai, 2013; Kim, 2013; Stevens, 1996). Based on these factor analysis results, seven attributes which had low factor loadings were eliminated. As we can see from Table 2 the "Financing tourism development", had the highest variance level (28.76) for the explanatory factors pertaining to the social interactions scale of rural tourism host in Greece and at the same time it has the highest average (5.89) while "Leadership" (5.28) has the lowest.

**Table 2:** Factor Analysis – Factor Loadings for key statements

Factor	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Cronbach a	Mean
<b>Factor 1: Financing tourism development</b>		4.78	28.76	0.88	5.89
The individual investors are reinforced and supported by financing protocols (e.g. Leader, Interreg, etc)	.829				5.91
The local government and the market banks are coordinated and they support the individuals who invest on tourism	.804				5.79
The financing of works related to tourism development and promotion of the tourism product are reinforced	.789				6.01
The local taxation from the local government contributes to the support of our tourism activities	.761				5.81
<b>Factor 2: Leadership</b>		3.27	18.69	0.78	5.28
The local leadership provides assistance and collaboration	.813				5.74
The local leadership identifies the needs of the individual professionals entrepreneurs-investors	.802				5.04
The local leadership accepts the fact that tourism depends on the collaboration between the individuals and the local organizations	.765				5.07
The activation of the State for the promotion of the Greek destinations cannot be successful without the support by the businesses	.714				5.22
We have skillful persons who manage well the available resources and they ensure the right management of the financial capitals and the resources from financing	.611				5.60
Our members have learned to collaborate in order to deal with the shortages and the problems that occur each time	.592				5.77
<b>Factor 3: Collaboration among tourism entrepreneurs</b>		1.89	10.92	0.74	5.54
The success of the tourist development in our region results from the existence of time available and the will of the entrepreneurs for developing cooperation's	.891				5.11
Our success results from the variety of enterprises which collaborate among themselves, e.g. shops, restaurants and sights	.772				6.08
There are nets of communication, collaboration and coordination among the retail traders of the region	.757				5.40
<b>Factor 4: Local government and community cooperation</b>		1.73	10.03	0.71	5.68
Local government aims at the development and promotion of tourism	.757				5.70
Local government aims at the construction and maintenance of infrastructure related to tourism	.747				5.67
The local government supports us through financial capitals for the creation of tourist brochures, through actions which ensure normal road traffic and supports us by improving the landscapes of the geographic region	.689				5.61

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .904

Furthermore we examine if successful rural enterprises items for every factor have any significance in 0.05% and 0.01% level. Findings revealed that subsidizing, size and peripheral economic condition are significantly influencing five of the respondents' views for and against the topic of successful rural enterprises factors we considered in the present study (table 2). For example, significant differences based on subsidizing exist on 0.05% significant level in two cases: The local government and the market banks are coordinated and they support the individuals who invest on tourism  $t=-2.418$ ,  $p=0.16$  where EU-Subsidized ( $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=0.963$ ) seem to support this comment more than Self-Subsidized ( $M=3.90$ ,  $SD=1.019$ ). Moreover we notice significance differences on respondent's opinion on the item "our members have learned to collaborate in order to deal with the shortages and the problems that occur each time" ( $T=-2.512$ ,  $p=0.012$ ) where self-subsidized ( $M=3.58$ ,  $SD=0.867$ ) support more this comment than EU-subsidized ( $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=0.911$ ).

Table 3: Items for successful rural entrepreneurship results of ANOVA and independent T- tests

Factor	Mean	Std Dev	Subsidi ng T	Size F	Periph. Econ. F
<b>Factor 1: Financing tourism development</b>	3.58	.711	-1.916	.496	.225
The individual investors are reinforced and supported by financing protocols (e.g. Leader, Interreg, etc)	3.49	.891	-0.678	-0.618	0.615
The local government and the market banks are coordinated and they support the individuals who invest on tourism	4.23	.957	<b>-2.418*</b>	0.611	0.852
The financing of works related to tourism development and promotion of the tourism product are reinforced	3.44	.886	-0.841	0.201	0.390
The local taxation from the local government contributes to the support of our tourism activities	3.17	.975	-1.309	-0.998	1.030
<b>Factor 2: Leadership</b>	3.62	.897	-1.041	1.846	0.427
The local leadership provides assistance and collaboration	3.38	.657	-1.431	1.040	1.089
The local leadership identifies the needs of the individual professionals entrepreneurs-investors	3.48	.886	-1.257	1.410	0.345
The local leadership accepts the fact that tourism depends on the collaboration between the individuals and the local organizations	3.78	.902	0.009	0.772	<b>2.968*</b>
The activation of the State for the promotion of the Greek destinations cannot be successful without the support by the businesses	3.33	.929	-0.1073	-0.569	1.870
We have skillful persons who manage well the available resources and they ensure the right management of the financial capitals and the resources from financing	4.04	.992	-0.765	<b>2.804**</b>	0.567
Our members have learned to collaborate in order to deal with the shortages and the problems that occur each time	3.72	.940	<b>-2.512*</b>	-0.508	0.889
<b>Factor 3: Collaboration among tourism entrepreneurs</b>	3.55	.612	-0.314	-.592	.638
The success of the tourist development in our region results from the existence of time available and the will of the entrepreneurs for developing cooperation's	3.45	.779	0.413	-1.674	1.063
Our success results from the variety of enterprises which collaborate among themselves, e.g. shops, restaurants and sights	3.37	.822	-0.548	-1.318	<b>4.442**</b>
There are nets of communication, collaboration and coordination among the retail traders of the region	3.83	.968	-1.034	-0.023	0.657
<b>Factor 4: Local government and community cooperation</b>	3.71	.729	-0.713	-1.069	1.202
Local government aims at the development and promotion of tourism	4.00	.945	-1.712	0.238	1.377
Local government aims at the construction and maintenance of infrastructure related to tourism	3.64	.711	-1.916	.496	.225
The local government supports us through financial capitals for the creation of tourist brochures, through actions which ensure normal road traffic and supports us by improving the landscapes of the	3.49	.891	-0.678	-0.618	0.615

Significant differences based on size do exist ( $p < 0.01$ ) in “we have skillful persons who manage well the available resources and they ensure the right management of the financial capitals and the resources from financing ( $F=2.804$ ,  $P=0.005$ ). Large companies ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=0.758$ ) support more this comment than medium ( $M=3.00$ ,  $SD=1.024$ ) and small companies ( $M=2.90$ ,  $SD=0.824$ ). Peripheral condition has significance in one case in 0.01% level and in one case in 0.05% level. In these two cases, “Our success results from the variety of enterprises which collaborate among themselves, e.g. shops, restaurants and sights ( $F=4.442$ ,  $p=0.004$ ), and “The local leadership accepts the fact that tourism depends on the collaboration between the individuals and the local organizations ( $F=2.968$ ,  $p=0.032$ )”, Poor Peripheries have lower mean scores ( $M=3.46$ ,  $SD=0.820$ ;  $M=3.29$ ,  $SD=0.906$ ;  $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=0.861$ ) Middle Class and Rich Peripheries ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=0.853$ ;  $M=3.75$ ,  $SD=0.989$ ;  $M=3.58$ ,  $SD=1.018$ ).

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