

Sustainable rural development through agritourism: the role of origin products and networking

Shpresim Domi, PhD

Email: shdomi@ubt.edu.al

Home institution: Agricultural University of Tirana

Address: Rr. Pajsi Vodica, Koder-Kamez, Tirana, Albania

Host institution: University of Florence

Address: Via delle Pandette 9 - 50127 Firenze, Italy

Abstract

Rural development (RD) is considered the key concept that foster development of rural areas and specifically agricultural sector. Aiming to have a sustainable rural development it means to support stakeholders who directly contribute on the shape of the rural economy such as farm enterprises. To this, recently, a huge number of studies are strongly arguing on agritourism as a tool for rural development. This strategy of farm activities diversification, increasing employment, and protecting the landscape, prevents depopulation and the abandonment of traditional cultures, provide more sustainable techniques that have positive impacts on the biodiversity and the natural resources.

While there is an ample of studies identifying agritourism activities as important for rural development, on the other side, there is a lack of studies that investigate the determinants that foster agritourism development. Due to the general positive effects of agritourism, it is essential to examine the determinants that mostly boost their performance. Origin-products encourage the relationship between the consumers and agritourism farms, and increase the number of visitors and their spending on the agritourism farms. In addition, networking is argued as a significant factor that enables agritourism farms to mobilize relationships in order to improve their economic performance and create new opportunities for growth. Furthermore, agritourism farms who have partners on offering their products, perform better than those who operate individually.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of agritourism as a strategy of rural development, and furthermore, to investigate the interplay effects of origin products and networks on agritourism performance.

In order to have an in-depth investigation of the agritourism as a strategy that foster rural development, we considered the case of Albania. In this vein, we did 6 face-to-face interviews with the managers and or owners of Agritourism farms, part of the target group.

Results indicate that agritourism in Albania, is a new and not yet consolidated phenomenon. While there is a small number of the agritourism farms, on the other side, there is a great potential. Overall, farmers engaged in agritourism claimed for a positive experience. Agritourism results a fantastic strategy to foster rural development, and as such, it is obvious that future rural development through agritourism strategy, needs a strong support and guide by local and central policymakers.

To empirically investigate the role of origin products and networks on agritourism performance, we considered the case of Tuscany region in Italy. Quantitative data from a survey to 277 Tuscany agritourism farms, together with qualitative information gathered from personal interviews, are considered. While the proposed positive effects of origin products on agritourism performance is significantly supported, on the other side, networking results a non-significant factor for agritourism performance. In addition, in contrast to what this study assumed, network doesn't mediate the OPs-performance relationship.

Implications from these findings are discussed.

Keywords: rural development, agritourism, origin products, networks