

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM ON ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection of rural tourism and entrepreneurial development, focusing on the impact of tourism activities on rural economies and the role of entrepreneurs in harnessing tourism potential. Through a thorough examination of historical development, demand factors, and current management practices, the study highlights the strategic position of rural tourism in contributing to economic growth and community development. It emphasizes the emergence of creative tourism as a catalyst for entrepreneurial ventures, where local businesses play a pivotal role in providing authentic experiences to tourists. Drawing from theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, the research traces the stages of tourism development and identifies the challenges and opportunities faced by small businesses in rural areas. Lifestyle entrepreneurship emerges as a significant driver, motivated by a desire to contribute to local revitalization and sustainable development. By analyzing motivations, management practices, and economic impacts, the study underscores the importance of fostering sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural tourism destinations. Ultimately, it advocates for policy interventions and strategic initiatives to support the growth of rural tourism businesses and enhance their contribution to economic and social well-being in rural communities.

Key Words: Rural tourism, Entrepreneurial development, Creative tourism, Sustainable development, and Economic impact

Introduction

Rural areas across the globe are increasingly recognized for their potential to foster economic growth and community development through tourism and entrepreneurship. Rural tourism, characterized by visits to countryside destinations, offers unique opportunities to experience natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and authentic local lifestyles. Simultaneously, entrepreneurship in rural settings drives innovation, creates employment, and contributes to the diversification of local economies. The intersection of rural tourism and entrepreneurship presents a fertile ground for exploring synergies that can amplify the socio-economic benefits for rural communities (Folorunso *et al.*, 2017).

Boswijk *et al.*, (2017) notes that in recent years, the significance of rural tourism as a catalyst for rural development has gained prominence. Travelers seeking authentic experiences and sustainable escapes from urban life are drawn to rural destinations, propelling the growth of tourism enterprises in these areas. The appeal of rural tourism lies in its ability to showcase the rich diversity of natural resources, traditions, and lifestyles inherent in rural landscapes. From agritourism ventures offering farm stays and culinary experiences to eco-tourism initiatives promoting conservation and outdoor recreation, rural tourism encompasses a wide spectrum of activities catering to diverse visitor interests.

Andersson & Thomsen (2018), assert that concurrently, entrepreneurship in rural contexts plays a pivotal role in harnessing the potential of tourism to drive economic prosperity. Local entrepreneurs leverage their creativity, resourcefulness, and intimate knowledge of the community to develop innovative tourism products and services. Whether through the establishment of boutique accommodations, adventure tour operations, or artisanal craft workshops, rural entrepreneurs contribute to the creation of unique and memorable experiences for tourists while generating income and employment opportunities locally.

However, the synergy between rural tourism and entrepreneurship is not without its challenges. Rural areas often face infrastructural limitations, access barriers, and economic disparities that can hinder the growth of tourism enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures. Moreover, the sustainability of rural tourism development hinges on striking a delicate balance between economic viability, environmental conservation, and socio-cultural preservation (Ray, 2018).

Against this backdrop, this study delves into the dynamic relationship between rural tourism and entrepreneurship, aiming to elucidate the mechanisms through which tourism activities can foster entrepreneurial development in rural areas. By examining the drivers, barriers, and socio-economic impacts of rural tourism entrepreneurship, this research seeks to inform policy interventions and strategic initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable rural development. Through a comprehensive analysis of theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and case studies, this study endeavors to shed light on the transformative potential of rural tourism entrepreneurship in shaping the future of rural communities worldwide.

Despite noticeable increase in demand for natural locations for tourism activities, some of these attractions are still in the raw forms. However, rural tourism is strategically positioned to contribute positively to rural development, hence its role in the development of entrepreneurial businesses. Tourism leads to the creation of new business opportunities which can be exploited for the enhancement of the livelihood of the rural community. However, for entrepreneurship to flourish there must be the policy framework to support entrepreneurship in the rural area to thrive and grow. This creates a gap that this study intends to fill, in the aspect of the extent to which rural tourism contributes to entrepreneurial development within the host destination.

The main aim of this study is to appraise the impact of tourism on entrepreneurial development in the rural tourist destination. This is to be achieved through the following objectives: to determine mode of practice of entrepreneurship of rural tourism; to appraise the relevance of entrepreneurial development; to investigate the impact of rural tourism on entrepreneurial development; and to ascertain the extent to which tourism contributes to the livelihood of the local community. The study focuses on the appraisal of the impact of rural tourism on entrepreneurial development. It also focuses on the rural area and its local people, especially how they benefit from the influx of tourist into their locality. This study tends to be more specific on the direct impact of the tourist activities in these rural areas on the entrepreneurial ventures of the local people.

The Practice of Entrepreneurship, Tourism and Everyday Life

Another area of convergence between entrepreneurship and tourism lies in their important grounding in everyday life. The role of 'everyday entrepreneurship' has become increasingly important with the rise of popular culture, and more recently new media, the Internet and social

networking (Burgess *et al.*, 2016a). A similar shift has taken place in tourism, where recent research on cultural and rural tourism has challenged the view of tourism as an activity removed from everyday life. Edensor, (2017), asserts that the idea of tourism as a ‘special time, it has deep roots in the tourism literature. For example, Graburn (2019), posits tourism as an escape from everyday life and Franklin (2018), argues that tourism permits our ‘everyday masks’ to be discarded, offering opportunities to explore different identities and take on ‘new’ roles. In his work on the tourist gaze, Urry (2015), also emphasizes the extraordinary nature of tourism, in which he opines that local people tends to embark on petty trading around the tourist destinations because they know that tourist will patronise them.

However, the practice of tourism has over the past two decades arguably evolved from a predominantly passive gaze to encompass more active forms of involvement by tourists in the everyday life of destinations. As exotic, long haul tourism destinations have become more commonplace in a world shrunk by globalization, the extraordinary has become harder to find in traditional forms of tourism consumption. Edensor (2017), notes that the breaking down of separate areas of social life, means that we can be tourists in our everyday travels, whether actual or virtual. The fragmentation of tourist specialisms into niche markets entails a proliferation of stages, activities and identities. The growing social and economic importance of leisure and a blurring between work and leisure in post-Fordist economies further obscures the distinction between tourism and the everyday. The impact of this is that tourist wants to be a part of the local culture, so they like to enjoy what the local entrepreneurs offers as part of what make up their whole tourist experience in the destination.

Stylianou-Lambert (2011), has argues that contemporary rural tourism is now more an extension of everyday life than a contrast to it. She found that even though cultural tourists may adopt a tourist gaze during travel, they do not abandon other gazes or perceptual ‘filters’ carried from home. By stepping outside the confines of the tourist gaze, cultural and creative tourists are engaging their creative skills to develop new relationships with the everyday life of the destination. These creative skills are exhibited by the local people to appeal tourists. At the end of the day, some of these creative items tends to be the main reason tourist decided to make a repeat visit to a certain destination.

In the world of tacit knowledge made available via the Internet, tourists can increasingly be viewed as the crafters of their own experience, as Richard (2015) suggests in *The Craftsman* 2008. Richard argues that craft skills have not vanished but rather migrated to new areas, such as the production of open source software. Craft, he argues is a form of social capital: tacit knowledge and skill accumulated over time and passed on through social interaction. Tacit knowledge is not only more difficult to transfer, arguably also more difficult to commodify, as it resides in the skilled person that possesses it. The embeddedness of creative knowledge and skills is one of the arguments for developing rural tourism. As Burgess *et al.*, (2016b) argue in the case of the ‘creative city’, knowledge transfer takes place within defined circuits between different groups and ‘scenes’ in the creative sector. One of the essential requirements of this system is physical spaces where people can meet and validate new cultural forms, or ‘playgrounds of entrepreneurship’ such as cafes, squares, museum foyers. These are also the new spaces that are often so attractive to tourists.

The interplay of producers and consumers in the development of rural tourism practices is underlined by Hartley (2007) and (Potts *et al.*, 2018). Instead of traditional value chains that run from producer to commodity to consumer, instead there are increasingly links between entrepreneur (who may be individuals or firms, who originate ideas), social networks, both real and virtual (adoption) and market-based enterprise, organizations and coordinating institutions who organize retention. The development of such ‘social network markets’ is also envisaged in the succession of different generations of experiences by Boswijk *et al.*, (2017), they argue that the producer-oriented first generation experiences described by Pine and Gilmore (2019) have been succeeded by second generation experiences based on co-creation between consumer and producer and more recently by third generation communities of producers and consumers in which the distinctions between the two roles effectively disappear.

The conception of entrepreneurship as a practice which unites consumers and producers in the ludic construction of space is illustrated by the analysis of flamenco tourism in Seville by Aoyama (2019). Seville has flamenco schools that also cater to tourists, providing them with the creative skills necessary to knowledgeably consume flamenco, and travel agents in the city specialize in packaging flamenco products. The provision of services related purely to performance and spectacle (often aimed at cultural tourists) is mainly restricted to the city centre

area close to hotels and restaurants. More production-related activities, such as flamenco schools, are found in the historic neighbourhoods further from the centre.

In a simpler term, the creative minds of both the local people to set up business that can cater for tourist needs lead to what we call creative tourism. In this case, tourist also tends to gain firsthand experience of the products on offer, for instance *adire* making. This creates an inclusiveness for tourists to be part of the process through which the local people go about their everyday business activities. One thing that's constant in this case is that tourist remain the major reason why the local people venture into that business line in the first place.

The Economic Impacts of Creative Entrepreneurial Tourism

The emergence of creative tourism reflects the growing integration between tourism and different place making strategies, including promotion of the creative industries, creative cities and creative class.

In context, Potts *et al.*, (2018), assert that creative tourism is also arguably an escape route from the serial reproduction of mass cultural tourism, offering more flexible and authentic experience which can be co-created between host and tourist. However, the gathering critique also highlights the potential dangers of creative hype and commodification of everyday life. Implementation of this initiative would help to boost city's image and awareness as well as bring in revenue. Through festivals, carnivals, handicraft trade fair, art exhibitions, the creative tourism industry could become a reality which intensify the growth rate of the tourism industry of any city or region. It all comes down to the model of introduction and how the idea is executed on the ground. The concept. The importance of the initiative is that it is a potent force in the life of towns and cities making them more attractive which increases the chances for more visitors. It also presents an avenue to better the quality of life for those who live in the creative hub. It suggests a host of numerous opportunities in the hospitality sector and could boost the economy. It could be good for Nigeria and the tourism industry in the future (Folorunso *et al.*, 2017).

Economic competitiveness among regions and cities is a complex strategy in the present world. One stage of the economic competitiveness is tourism industry, which occurs in a variety of ways and contexts. Several economists suggest ideas on enhancing the competitiveness with the help of small firms working with handicrafts, particularly those located in tourist destinations.

Pike studied the destination marketing and recognized that the handicraft industries empowered tourism and increased the number of tourists in sake of creative handicrafts. Dwyer named some elements of a successful tourism industry, including the ability to invest in handicraft productions, which the recent tourists are interesting in (Potts *et al.*, 2018).

The above-mentioned scholars and many others believe that the handicraft tourism is one of the activities with the greatest potential for expansion on local and regional scales. The handicrafts assist the tourism sites to compete with other regions owing to their varieties, growth potentials, intellectual meanings, physical beauty and being consumable in tourism destinations. Consequently, the empowered competitive ability increases the local/regional shares in the tourism industry. As clusters of handicraft industries are competitiveness devices in regional tourism development, the region will increase its share.

Methodology

This study being a positional review does not involve any case study, however, secondary data was employed to thoroughly investigate the objectives of this work. The research philosophy employed by this study is library research method through which secondary data were extracted from journals, periodicals and academic essays relevant to the scope of this study. Data collection for this study was achieved through the traditional desk research methods. This method of data collection was carefully employed to extract as much information as possible in order to make the data valid and reliable. The choice of this method is justified by the magnitude of the scope of this work, as it is particularly useful for exploring broad topics, conducting preliminary investigations, or informing the design of primary research studies. Therefore, several relevant published works were critically examined to form a suitable source of secondary data for this work.

Discussion

The findings of this work revealed that rural tourism is strategically positioned to contribute positively to rural development. Hence its role in the development of entrepreneurial businesses. Tourism leads to the creation of new business opportunities which can be exploited for the

development. This is term creative tourism, so creative tourism is bedrock of entrepreneurial development through tourism promotion and development (Andersson & Thomsen 2018).

Aoyama (2019) asserts that small businesses in rural tourism face multiple constraints, in many circumstances worsened by their location in rural areas and their reduced size. Businesses in this specific context face a reality in which entrepreneurs have to overcome various difficulties in managing and making their business feasible, such as the lack of managerial resources and skills or the incapacity to hire qualified staff. This arises a result of their urge to satisfy the tourist who are the main target market for this products. Recent debate on 'lifestyle entrepreneurship' suggests that one of these potential success factors would be the corresponding entrepreneurial orientation that can be found in some of the small business owners, apparently contributing to more proactive, entrepreneurial and sustainable management practices, thus leading to better overall performance and results.

At the same time, Franklin (2018), notes that these entrepreneurs appear to be valuable players in boosting local economy and the sustainable development of the region where they operate their businesses. Tourism entrepreneurship typically promotes new investment, creation of jobs and income, but can also help increase the perception of value of unique endogenous resources, like local products. The resulting economic and social dynamics bring new usages to old resources, revitalizing small communities through, for example, local and extra-local networks, strengthened local trading and increase in social capital, essential to these small communities' survival.

Lifestyle entrepreneurs are individuals who develop their business as part of a lifestyle strategy that they believe to be more interesting, balanced or sustainable (Boswijk *et al.*, 2017). The passion for nature, life in the countryside or the possibility of balancing work with family or other personal interests are aspects that motivate these entrepreneurs and keep them optimistic and confident in the future. Commitment to business results is, in this context, an indispensable condition to maintain the desired way of living. Therefore, management practices tend to reflect that concern and appear to be more professional. The management practices reflect, on the one hand, entrepreneurs' values and beliefs, apart from their professional and academic background.

The drive to start a small business, and a tourism business in particular, is in many cases related to the desire to make a contribution to the revitalization of certain places that, for some reason,

they are attached to (Burgess *et al.*, 2016a). Rural tourism businesses, although typically of small size and affected by rural contexts (i.e. remoteness from large markets, from skilled labor force and disperse business networks), can be successful and give a valuable contribution to entrepreneurial dynamics of inland territories, also because they depend on their surrounding natural and social environment to maintain the business and the desired lifestyle.

Despite the mentioned growing interest in sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs), the need of rural tourism businesses to cooperate and the increasing awareness of the potential of lifestyle entrepreneurs in providing particularly interesting and innovative businesses, their role in contributing to sustainable EEs has been largely neglected. This study has been able to explore the motivations and management practices of rural tourism entrepreneurs, particularly of those whose profile aligns with tourist interest and concerns. This helps to acclimatize the results achieved by these entrepreneurs, and make the contributions to the creation of sustainable entrepreneurial ventures in the villages where their businesses are located possible.

Rural areas are increasingly affected by the loss of economic opportunities and by a significant decrease in population, which impacts negatively on local economies. Tourism potential for development of these settings has been widely recognized (OECD, 2016); however, also the challenges associated to actually realizing this potential in frequently constrained local contexts and in an increasingly competitive environment are obvious. Rural economies benefit from new investments, job creation and the dynamics of tourism businesses, particularly if well connected to other economic sectors (Kim, 2007). Additionally, direct tourist spending on tourism services, other local services and products is as an important outcome of rural tourism businesses (Kim, 2007; Burgess *et al.*, 2016b).

Rural territories are often dispose of a unique set of natural and cultural resources that might represent good business opportunities. Local businesses and inspired entrepreneurs are crucial to transform those resources into attractive and competitive tourism products, desirably, sustainable ones (Franklin, 2018). Entrepreneurs of small tourism businesses in rural contexts, although heterogeneous, have been reported as driven by lifestyle motives, enjoying a high socio-economic and cultural status (Graburn, 2019), with the “family first” orientation towards their businesses (Burgess *et al.*, 2016b). Motivations to create the business are mostly centered on quality of life and local environmental variables, and frequently comprise the desire to contribute

to a more sustainable environment (Boswijk *et al.*, 2017). A passion for the countryside and the rural way of life and the possibility to work autonomously, along with the aspiration to enjoy a certain lifestyle, are common motives driving lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism

The Impact Tourism on Rural Entrepreneurship Development

Some authors state that many entrepreneurs in tourism are driven by lifestyle motives, having little formal qualifications, no prior management experience or professional tourism skills, characteristics commonly associated with low performance (Peters *et al.*, 2019). Regardless of these arguments, some of the entrepreneurs with a strong lifestyle motivation show an approach to business that seems to be more entrepreneurial in nature, contributing to proactive management practices. They are frequently particularly capable of understanding tourists' needs and desires because they actually value most what these tourists look for in the countryside, sometimes having moved away from the city and radically opted against a stressful modern urban life (Fiske, 2018). On the other hand, Burgess *et al.*, (2016a) argue that many of these entrepreneurs have gained professional working skills in other domains that are transferrable to their tourism business.

Furthermore, their skills, attitudes and lifestyle motivations permit them to develop management practices that appear to be also more sustainable, generating positive business results, as well as entrepreneurial and personal fulfillment (Andersson & Thomsen, 2018). Valuing the countryside, its unique endogenous resources, these entrepreneurs typically try to integrate local food and other products into their rural tourism businesses; they tend to value local traditions and frequently make an effort to be part of local community dynamics (Andersson & Thomsen, 2018). They are often more open to partnerships and local networks while also helping establish networks to the urban markets, to whom they have natural connections (Peters *et al.*, 2019). They value nature and local heritage, help setting it into value and are concerned about protecting it, also because they identify with the place (Ray, 2018).

Consequently, Potts *et al.*, (2018), state that although quality of life variables is important to understand the motivation of these entrepreneurs to enter rural tourism businesses, evidence shows that lifestyle motivations do not necessarily imply the disregard of economic objectives. In fact, in many cases, lifestyle motives are embedded within an economic agenda, the two types of motives being intrinsically linked and positively related to good results of the businesses as

well as to a positive contribution of these businesses to a more dynamic and sustainable local tourism system (Prentice, & Andersen, 2013).

One must acknowledge the importance both of diversity for the resilience of the destinations ecosystem to keep its carrying capacity and of the forces that promote coherence of these systems' functioning (Kim, 2007). In the same vein, Fiske (2018), highlights the interdependence and interconnected nature of the multiple actors for rural tourism entrepreneurship. Individuals and organizations have to operate according to some degree of common vision, shared values and intentions, culminating unarticulated behaviours to achieve a certain coherence, which in turn creates the structure that gives form and solidity to the local community.

Conclusion

Aoyama (2019), finds that social entrepreneurs in rural contexts have a significant role in identifying the opportunities to develop tourism potential in rural destinations, stressing their contribution to catalyze a collective vision and develop networks that help to achieve social objectives. Most of the scholars additionally stress that such entrepreneurs simultaneously help redesign rural tourism destinations, within new, eventually more sustainable forms of development.

Rural regions' economies show high levels of vulnerability to social, political and financial fluctuations, affecting negatively the capacity of small businesses to stay solvent (Ray, 2018). In certain contexts, rural tourism has been recognized as a viable strategy to enhance regional development contributing to the local entrepreneurial activity, promoted either by neo-rural entrepreneurs or local residents (Peters *et al.*, 2019). Several factors are known to be relevant to understand entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural contexts, namely the quality of life context, community culture, governance, networking or human and financial elements, among others (Burgess *et al.*, 2016a). Nevertheless, other important aspects deserve attention, like lifestyle entrepreneurs' sustainability motivations and impacts. These may be related to the role of family dynamics, explaining these enterprises' long-term orientation and social embeddedness, the entrepreneurs' attachment to the place and their genuine desire to have a positive impact on the local area (Ray, 2018).

Conclusively, Hartley (2007) and Kim (2007), deduce that network density appears to be stronger among rural entrepreneurs who engage in sustainable business models. Such sustainable entrepreneurship has been defined as the recognition and exploitation of opportunities to create new products and services that provide economic, social and ecological gains to local communities. These sustainability-oriented business models comprise principles of community spirit, close relationships between entrepreneurs, customers and other stakeholders enhancing co-responsibility in production and consumption, defining the value proposition of products or services focused on ecological, social and economic value, among others (Fiske, 2018). Rural entrepreneurs embody a particular way of doing business, showing a clear motivation to cooperate and adopt sustainability values, both in their environmental and social dimensions in order to ensure continuous patronage and visit of both local and international tourists, who are the main stakeholders of the entire ventures.

Finally, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Efforts should be made to promote tourism in the rural area, as it has a direct impact on entrepreneurial development on the host community.
2. Government at level should make policies that will encourage the tourism in rural areas.
3. There should be proper orientation for the stakeholders on essence of tourism in entrepreneurial development.

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