

SAMPLE OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL:

“Rural Tourism Development for the Prefecture of Lassithi in Crete.”

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

Over the last two decades or so, the whole world has experienced rapid changes and socioeconomic transformations. The socioeconomic changes affected and caused severe stress mainly to isolated, peripheral and rural areas of the world. However, the changes in economic and social culture structure of the world caused decreased farm revenues, changing in the farmland values and high rates of unemployment, leading to mass exodus of the productive forces and lack of balance in the demographics of rural areas (Gannon, 1993).

It is obvious from the above that the need of rural areas for socioeconomic development and regeneration along with the need for diversification of their economic base so as to meet the changes is today greater than ever. In that sense, tourism is today a promising industry and one of the main sectors that national and local governments support and promote as a vehicle for revitalization of the rural areas.

The development of rural tourism was followed by the changes on tourist's demands and behavior. Tourism in rural areas offers the potentials for alternative, individual and more authentic tourism experiences satisfying the needs of the experienced and highly demanded “new” tourists. In addition there is a demand for tourism and recreation activities in the countryside that is different than that of traditional resorts and mass tourism destinations (Page et al., 1997).

The motivation behind of this project is based on the fact that during the last few decades the growth of Greek tourist industry has been dramatic. Traditional tourism development, concentrated in coastal and mountain resorts, urban and cultural centers, has proven that tourism can bring enormous benefits to the economy, society and environment of a certain area. However at the same time there is a realization that certain parts of the

country have been left behind in development. Given their resources in the form of build and natural environment they are increasingly seems as areas for rural tourism development.

The Greek government is currently promoting rural tourism in order to sustain local economies, and to enhance employment and growth. Although rural tourism is regarded as a new feature of the Greek supply of tourism opportunities, in recent years demands for holidays in small villages and the countryside has increased significantly in many rural regions of the world.

The local of this research is a peripheral area of Greece, called Prefecture of Lassithi. It is located in the Eastern part of the biggest island of Greece, the Cretan island. Even though that rural tourism is in its infancy in the region, prefecture of Lassithi provides a unique opportunity for the study of rural tourism for the purposes of this research.

The research project will therefore seek to explore and investigate the following:

- To examine the extent to which rural tourism contributes to the economy of the prefecture of Lassithi in Crete.
- To identify and evaluate the demand for rural tourism at the prefecture of Lasithi.
- To identify and evaluate if the supply meets the demand for rural tourism at the prefecture of Lassithi.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

“Traditional, agriculture and forestry were central to rural life. They were the major employers of labor, the main sources of income within the rural economy and indirectly had a powerful influence on traditions, power structures and life styles” (Lane, 1994: 17)

2.1 WHAT IS “RURAL”

There is not one common definition of rural anywhere in the literature and the various definitions that exist differ not only in scale but also in philosophy. While many countries use specific criteria for rurality, there is no universal agreement on the critical threshold which distinguishes between urban and rural populations (Roberts et al., 2001).

2.2 DEFINITION OF RURAL TOURISM

Even though it seems simple to define rural tourism as “tourism that takes place in the countryside” this definition does not include the complexity of the activities and the different forms and meanings developed in different countries, as well as the number of protagonists participating in rural tourism (Lane, 1993).

According to (Lane, 1994) it is difficult to define rural tourism since there is not a systematic source of data in rural tourism and neither World Tourism Organization (WTO) nor the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have appropriate measures.

Nevertheless, Opperman (1996) suggested that the field of rural tourism still lacks a comprehensive body of knowledge and theoretical framework. He argued that this is caused by

- a) Definitional problems concerning what constitutes rural tourism
- b) Lack of data sources on small, rural enterprises which makes rural tourism much less obvious and signifies much more tedious work for researchers in their quest for data (Butler et al, 1998:224).

Although, the need to differentiate rural tourism from other forms of tourism exists. Even if there is ambiguity between urban and rural and it is certainly difficult to speak about strictly rural characteristics, people still shape images and views of the countryside that differ from those of the town. The social representations of rural areas by the media and

the perceptions of individuals for the countryside certainly create a demand for these spaces and shape consequently the distinctive form of rural tourism (Bramwell, 1994).

Looking at the supply side, rural tourism can be understood in three different ways:

- a) Rural tourism is perceived as “working class tourism”. It depicts the image of a poor man’s holiday, which stays with a local resident in a rural area.
- b) Rural tourism is associated with a particular form of accommodation, as well as with the option of undertaking specific activities.
- c) Rural tourism is defined as a type of holiday where the place of stay is on a farm, and the organized activities are connected with and around the farm. In this case, rural tourism is limited to farm tourism or Agri-tourism (Grefe, 1994).

According to a broader definition, given by Gannon (1994: 5):

“Rural tourism includes a range of activities services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their businesses”.

According to a European Union definition “*rural tourism is a vast concept covering other services besides accommodation such as events, festivities, outdoor recreation, production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural products*” (Commission of the European Communities, 1987: 218). Nevertheless, according to Murdoch (1993), not all tourism in rural areas can consider to be strictly “rural”.

Therefore because of the complex nature of tourism as well as that of rural areas there is a considerable ambiguity as to what constitutes rural tourism. Indisputably there arises a need for more unequivocal definition of rural tourism (Lane, 1993).

2.3 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism is not altogether a new phenomenon. Interest in the country side recreation started to grow towards the end of the eighteenth century as a reaction to the stress of the increasing urbanization and industrialization. The nature and the countryside became the “gaze” of tourists (Urry, 1990) and influenced poets and artists. However its growth and development is due to technological advance, the availability of free time and the increase in disposal income (Sharpley, 1996).

The biggest demand occurred after the end of the second world war, and the most influential factor was the increase in car ownership, which enabled more people to visit the countryside (Harrison, 1991).

However, the rural tourism of the eighties, the nineties and our era is different. The number of tourists involved has increased significantly, the range of activities and types of rural holidays has continued to expand, and tourism has developed in all types of countryside instead of being limited to areas of exceptional scenic beauty (Knudson, 1985).

2.4 THE DEMAND FOR RURAL TOURISM

Demand is a well defined part of the planning process. Bangure and Arbel (1976:76) go as far as to state that “supply-demand relationships are the cornerstone of planning in tourism industry”. However, the concept of demand is broad and the term demand is used loosely throughout the literature to mean anything from macroeconomic demand, to tourism need.

With reference to rural tourism, demand has significantly increased in recent years. Nevertheless this does not necessarily mean that it is in position to compete with the seaside holidays. In order for rural tourism to be in a place to estimate its development, growth and value, and improve its position it is vital to measure the demand (Sharpley,

1997). Nevertheless, “the measurement of demand of rural tourism faces problems due to the lack of an internationally agreed definition, and the variations of rural tourism activities and pursuits” (Sharpley, 1996: 60).

2.5 THE SUPPLY OF RURAL TOURISM

Supply, can be defined as a point of destination where demand may be fulfilled (Mitchel, 1991). Tourism supply is anchored in two principles: one is a service to provide for demands of tourists and the other is a site or location, which attracts tourist (Mitchell, 1994).

Due to its multiactivity and multisectoral nature rural tourism is comprising an enormous variety of activities, which take place in various rural locations, and it involves a multitude of public and private organizations and businesses, which vary from a big state, owned companies to small family owned ones (Ashworth, 1992; Sharpley, 1996).

2.5 RURAL TOURISM IMPACTS

Although rural tourism is a small sector of the world’s tourism market it can and already making a significant contribution to the development process in the most disadvantages areas. However it’s contribution is not only in economic terms but it also hides social and environmental benefits, as well as equally important costs.

According to Cooper et al. (1993), these potential impacts depend on a range of criteria: the number of tourists arrivals, the structure of the host economy, the type of tourism activity, the difference in socio-cultural characteristics between the hosts and the tourists, and the fragility of the local environment.

The following analysis of the positive and negative impacts of rural tourism is based on the work of Gannon (1994)

2.5.1 Economic Impacts

Benefits of rural tourism

- Rural tourism strengthens the economy as foreign currency is added.
- It increases job opportunities, the family and community income.
- It helps to diversify and therefore stabilize the local economy.
- It increases the investments and therefore creates business opportunities both within and outside the industry.
- It provides the opportunity for innovation and creativity.
- It strengthens and supports the existing businesses and services.
- It supports local craft and trade.

Costs of rural tourism

- It generates developmental and marketing costs that often involve risks for the operator and community.
- It increases the demands on public services.
- The nature of employment may be part time.
- Since tourism is an image industry, it can be vary sensitive to the conditions of the macro-environment and can attract outside direct community control.
- It usually brings about increased prices for property, goods and services causing therefore, high cost of leaving for community residents.

2.5.2 Social Impacts

Benefits of rural tourism

- It creates a pride of place and a sense of place.
- It makes stronger the community infrastructure.
- It brings different people together providing therefore opportunities for cultural exchange.
- Through the development of cultural and entertainment activities brings people of the community closer and creates a team spirit.

- It supports the safeguarding and enhancing of local cultural identities.

Social costs of rural tourism

- It can reinforce the introduction of ideas and styles that may conflict with the traditional ones.
- It can increase crime.
- It brings about overcrowding and congestion.
- It causes conflicts between the locals and the tourists in the using of important community resources.
- It can raise conflicts and jealousies between the members of community when the benefits of tourism are not equally shared.

2.5.3 Environmental impacts

Benefits of rural tourism

- Rural tourism can be the mean for conserving and revitalizing the natural, cultural and historical resources of a rural region.
- It promises and supports ideas for village renewal and clean countryside

Costs of rural tourism

- The increased and unplanned tourism and tourist behavior may cause deterioration of the natural environment or the historic areas.
- It can increase noise and litter pollution.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology that will be applied by the study has been chosen in order to acquire information and deduce conclusions about the development and the role of rural tourism in the area of the prefecture of Lassithi, in Crete.

3.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND TYPE OF INVESTIGATION

The idea of this research had its genesis from Author's interest about tourism development studies. This research will continue study from a previous research done from the author in the specific area. The previous research had identify several opportunities for ecotourism development in the area, (Sillignakis, 2002) therefore author now will attempt to identify and analyze one specific sector of ecotourism, which is rural tourism.

The main purposes of this study is to obtain an insight into the current development of rural tourism in the area of the prefecture of Lassithi in order to propose further recommendations for efficient rural development.

For the above reason, this research will take an exploratory approach. According Sekaran (2002:123) an exploratory study is undertaken when not much is known about the situation at hand, or when no information is available on how similar problems or research issues have been solved in the past. The aim will be to gain familiarity with the issues, and to gain a deeper understanding about the topic.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

For the purpose of this research, and in order to achieve the objectives will be collected and will be used both primary and secondary data. The secondary data will contribute toward the formation of background information, needed by both the researcher in order to build constructively the project and the reader to comprehend more thoroughly the survey outcome.

Primary data will be collected in two ways. Firstly, a questionnaire survey will be conducted with tourists visiting the area. Secondly, interviews will be also carried out with providers of accommodation services and members of the local authority.

3.3 SAMPLING DESIGN

Ideally one wants to study is the entire population. However, usually it is impossible or unfeasible to do this and therefore one must settle for a sample. According to Black and Champion (1976), sample is a portion of elements taken from a population, which is considered to be representative of the population.

In order to collect primary data the questionnaire survey technique will be used. For the purpose of this study *random probability sampling* is selected. As Rescoe (1975) cites in Sakaran (2000:296), “sample sizes larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research”. Having in mind these limitations, the sample size that will be consisted of about 100 questionnaires, designed for the visitors at the prefecture of Lassithi.

Also interview survey technique will be used. The sample population for the interviews will include accommodation providers and local authorities representatives.

3.4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Cohen (1989) defines a questionnaire as a self-report instrument used for gathering information about variables of interest to an investigation.

For this study closed-ended questions were designed in order to call for responses, which narrow down the field of enquiry, since the respondents chooses among fixed responses. They also help the researcher to analyse easier the data since the responses can be directly compared and easily aggravated (Patton, 1990), they are versatile; surveys can be employed among people of all ages and they are replicated from one subject to another (Aaker & Day, 1990; Kotler, 1994) and many questions can be answered in a short time. It should also be noted that close-ended questions could lead to bias since respondents are offered limited alternative replies.

The questionnaire is consisted of three parts. (**Appendix 1.1**) The first part is designed to gather information about the tourist behavior and attitudes as regards the demand and supply of the rural product, the second part is designed to assess the tourists' experience with rural tourism, level of satisfaction and their evaluation of the facilities and services on offer, and the third part was asking for classified data.

3.5 THE INTERVIEW SURVEY

The technique of personal interviewing is undertaken in order to reach the objectives since it is the most versatile and productive method of communication, enabled spontaneity, and also provided with:

“The skill of guiding the discussion back to the topic outlined when discussions are unfruitful while it has the disadvantages of being very costly time consuming and can introduce bias through desires of the respondent to please the interviewer” (Aaker & Day, 1990: 164).

For the purpose of this project semi-structured face to face interviews will be conducted involving two interest groups: local authorities and accommodation providers. The choice will be based on researcher's knowledge about different educational levels among interviewees, their different lifestyles and ages, which make imperative an adaption in questions so that they ensure the comprehension by the interviewee i.e., repeat, or rephrase the question.

3.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

It is intended that the findings of this research project will be used local and regional authorities to assess and evaluate the current rural tourism development and to gain knowledge on visitors' perceptions about their experience during their visit in the prefecture of Lassithi. These findings could be used for correction of the current rural tourism development in the area.

APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire

(PART A)

Question 1

Is this the first time that you take a rural holiday?

- YES
- NO

Question 2

If not, how many times have been on a rural holiday before?

- ONCE
- TWICE
- THREE TIMES
- FOUR TIMES
- FIVE TIMES
- OVER FIVE TIMES

Question 3

If this is not your first visit in the area, when was your last visit?

YEAR _____

MONTH _____

Question 4

How long is this visit for?

- OVERNIGHT
- 2-5 DAYS
- 6-10 DAYS
- MORE THAN 10 DAYS

Question 5

How did you travel to this place on this visit?

- PRIVATE CAR
- HIRE VEHICLE
- MOTORBIKE
- TOUR BUS
- PUBLIC BUS/COACH
- OTHER

Question 6

What is the type of your group?

- TOUR GROUP
- FAMILY
- FRIENDS
- SPOUSE/PARTNER
- OTHER SPECIFY

Question 7

What is the purpose of this visit?

- PART OF PACKAGE TOUR
- RECREATION
- SEEING NATURE
- ON HOLIDAY
- VISITING FRIENDS/PARTNER
- BUSINESS
- RURAL HOUSE EXPERIENCE
- OTHER

Question 8

How did you hear about rural tourism before you visit?

- BROCHURE
- RECOMMENDATION
- WORD OF MOUTH
- TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER
- TRAVEL EXHIBITION
- NEWSPAPER or MAGAZINE
- FRIENDS or RELATIVES

- OTHER

(PART B)

Question 9

Do you have any problems finding information about rural house accommodation?

- YES (Specify) _____
- NO

Question 10

Did you experience any problems traveling to the area?

- YES (Specify) _____
- NO

Question 11

The question below ask you to state whether you think that the facilities provided in the area are adequate for the number of visitors present today. (Indicate your answer by using the scale provided)

Strongly agree=5

Agree=4

Neutral=3

Disagree=2

Strongly disagree=1

Adequate

Non-adequate

1

2

3

4

5

Question 12

The question below ask you to rate the below facilities. (Indicate your answer by putting the most appropriate response number for you on the side of each item, using the above scale)

- ACCOMODATION
- INFORMATION CENTER

- RETAIL SHOPS
- RESTAURANT
- TOILETS
- PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- RECREATION ACTIVITIES
- OTHER

Question 13

Taking everything into account did you enjoy your visit?

- YES, EXCELLENT
- YES, GOOD
- REASONABLY
- NOT REALLY
- DO NOT KNOW

Question 14

Do you plan to visit again?

- YES
- NO
- DO NOT KNOW

Question 15

What is your nationality?

Question 16

Gender

- FEMALE
- MALE

Question 17

Which age category do you fall in?

- UNDER 20
- 20 – 24
- 25 – 29
- 30 – 39
- 40 – 49
- 50+

Question 18

What is your marital status?

- MARRIED
- SINGLE
- WIDOWED
- DIVORCED/SEPERATED
- OTHER

Question 19

Number of preschool children (under 5 years of age)

- NONE
- ONE
- TWO
- THREE OR MORE