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*International Conference on
Rural Tourism and Regional
Development*

*Proceedings - Rural Tourism
as a Facilitator of Regional
Development*



Joensuu, 2014
Editors: Jarno Suni & Raija Komppula
Layout: Jarno Suni

ISBN: 978-952-61-1416-3 (PDF)

Forewords

University of Eastern Finland, Karelian Institute of Tourism, Savonia University of Applied Sciences and Karelia University of Applied Sciences organize an international conference on tourism and regional development in the city of Petrozavodsk, Russia. The conference is a tribute to fruitful cooperation of these organizations in developing rural tourism in the Euregio Karelia Region in form of an ENPI-project (RUNAT - Product development and development of market insight and e-marketing of rural and nature tourism, <http://www.aducate.fi/runat>)

During the conference, researchers and specialists in rural tourism present research papers in two seminar rooms. In session room A the papers are presented in English, and referred shortly in this introduction part. In Session room B the papers are presented in Russian language and are available directly from the authors. The papers of the last session in room B, the RUNAT session, have been published in May 2014 in a separate publication called *The Attractiveness of Rural Tourism Destinations in the Republic of Karelia and Eastern Finland*, which is available as a electronic document from the library of University of Eastern Finland.

RURAL TOURISM AS A FACILITATOR OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural tourism is tourism “of the area”, sought after and controlled by local authorities. Agritourism, farm tourism, rural tourism, soft tourism, alternative tourism and many others describe tourism activity in peripheral rural areas. Small and micro size enterprises are numerically dominant and represent a key distinguishing feature of the rural tourism industry. The small scale of companies and their functional relationship with nature, heritage and traditional societies are characteristic for rural tourism enterprises.

Rural tourism facilitates the development of declining areas by providing additional forms of employment and reducing out-migration. An example of this is given at the conference by Christian Nordhorn from Germany. He presents a case study from Italy, where a new innovation is launched for villages that are suffering from rural migration. The new concept “Albergo Diffuso” (AD) refers to using rooms in abandoned houses as a new form of rural accommodation. According to his findings, AD contributes to a revival of the rural area, and the emigration has stopped and even young families have moved to the villages.

Especially in less developed countries, rural tourism seems to improve the marginal status of women in the rural workforce, since the majority of farm

based tourist enterprises are owned and run by a single family. Wineaster Anderson and Frederick Salieli Makundi present a study from Tanzania, where the government has established so called cultural tourism modules in order to create a form of tourism which would generate direct economic benefits to local people. In their study cultural tourism refers to “a community based tourism initiative in which the local people are directly involved in designing and organising tours to show tourists aspects of life in the area in which they live”.

While tourism has proved to be successful at creating many jobs in rural areas, it has sometimes been the determinant of primary resource industries, especially to agriculture. An extra income in service sector might be preferred to unpredictable farming income. A Japanese example by Yasuo Ohe is from a farm diversification perspective, presenting a case study on Japanese farmers, who provide educational services for the clients on their dairy farms. Another example is given by Rob Hood from Canada, where forestry, mining and fishing have served as pillars for the economy, but where tourism now plays a growing role in sustaining the livelihoods of the local communities. Cooperation between the rural tourism businesses and local food production is promoted also by Daniel Zacher and Harald Pechlaner, who present the case “Juradistl”, a distribution network of agricultural products, local tourism industry being one of the main users of this platform.

As rural tourism is based on local entrepreneurship, cultural heritage and nature, sustainability issues are in a key role. All three views for the concept of sustainable tourism (McCool & Moisey, 2009) are relevant in rural tourism context: 1) Sustaining tourism (How to maintain businesses in tourism industry over a long period?), 2) Tourism as a tool and not as an end for development (What should tourism sustain?) and 3) Sustainable tourism, based on an argument that there are finite biophysical and social limits to tourism development. Finnish researchers Petra Blinnikka, Anja Härkönen, Hanna-Maija Väisänen and Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen have touched sustainability issues in rural tourism by conducting a study on how the three dimensions of sustainability are visible in rural businesses’ business ideas, operational environments, business operations, product development, marketing and production of services. Their findings reveal that every dimension of sustainability is visible to some extent, but the ecological aspect dominates. Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen, Anne Matilainen and Jorma Asunta studied in the same region the attitudes and sustainable values of the rural tourists. Their findings indicate that the customer group valuing sustainability is by no means homogeneous, and their willingness to pay for sustainability does vary a lot based on their interests and values.

In rural areas small businesses and entrepreneurs are the foundation of the tourism. By delivering the tourism reality and making the region attractive, they hence influence the development of the destination beyond their own individual contribution. Local enterprises together with local people of-

ten also are initiators and organizers of different kinds of events, which during the times may grow from a small village fest to an international festival. Kari Jæger and Kjell Olsen present an interesting study, which is conducted in the context of four different festivals in northern Norway. Their focus is on the motivation of volunteers working for the festivals. For them the work may be a tourist experience but for the community offering the festival the input of volunteers is a determining factor of the success of the event. It must be noted that even small events may have an important economic and social impact on a rural community, if it attracts visitors outside the community.

For the customer, rural tourism is about experiences: nature, local culture, relaxation, nature based activities, wellbeing. Tourism business is about giving promises, enabling the delivery of services and delivering promises for the customers. Successful development of rural tourism experience products calls for understanding of customer expectations and demands, responding to these demands and delivering services that enable memorable experiences. The study of Kirstin Hallmann, Sabine Müller, Christoph Breuer and Magnuz Metz is about customer insight, about how the expectations of the customers of a rural winter sport destination may differ and how to segment the customers in order to be able to differentiate the offering.

Gaining competitive advantage for a rural tourism destination requires the ability to effectively manage all components of the tourism system, and DMOs are established in order to provide leadership for the management of tourism in the destination. Lena-Marie Lun, Harald Pechlaner and Michael Volgger present findings of a multiple case study striving to identify key success factors, risks and potentials for the development of attractive tourism products and services within rural and mountain areas. Their study was conducted in Austria, Italy, Romania, Ukraine and Poland, and the findings indicate that integration of agriculture and tourism greatly contributes to deliver authentic tourism experiences. They also note that leadership, inter-sectoral networks, quality orientation and effective communication are key success factors for rural tourism development.

On the other hand, as Heike Bähre, Carmen Chasovschi and Ulrike Fergen state, the tourism destination areas are not defined and viewed from the guests' viewpoint but designed according to administrative boundaries. This is emphasized in the paper by Natalia Petrova and Nikolai Kolesnikov who studied cross-border tourism regions in Europe and especially the cross-border region of Karelia in Finland and Russia. According to findings by Bähre, Chasovschi and Fergen, the administrative boundaries "are standing in a way of better tourism development and marketing." Hence, they call for a systematic and well structured destination management which should be realized by many of the relevant actors. This notion is supported by Per Strömberg, who has studied rural skiing destinations of Funäsdalsfjällen and Åre, which both have applied the principles of design management in order to express their own profiles and in creating a holistic tourist environment for the visitors.

Nevertheless, in many rural areas the tourism infrastructure is not developed and responsibility for the destination development is in the hands of individual entrepreneurs, who do not have sufficient resources for effective marketing. Hence, public-private cooperation is a necessity in rural areas. As a cooperative partner, an individual firm can enhance both destination competitiveness and its own competitiveness through specialization, innovation, investment, risk taking and productivity improvements, as well as adopting ethical and cooperative business practices. Presentations in the parallel session B in Russian language present several examples of innovative practices in developing rural tourism in Karelia. Also the results of the studies conducted in the ENPI-project RUNAT that rural tourism is an attractive holiday option for many, and that by hard-working development work and by listening to the expectations and wishes of the customer the rural tourism enterprises may get good results. The ENPI-project results also indicate that cooperation between private and public sector as well as the strong collaboration with universities has made the favourable development possible.

As a conclusion it can be argued that rural tourism is tourism of tomorrow, responsible and sustainable in its values and experiential for the tourist. Developing rural tourism is development of the region, enhancement of the wellbeing of the local community. Long live rural tourism!

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- McCool, S.F. & Moisey, R.N. (Eds.) (2009). *Tourism, Recreation and Sustainability: Linking Culture and the Environment*. 2nd Edition. Wallingford: CABI.

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International Conference on Rural Tourism and Regional Development, 20th-22nd May 2014
Conference program

Monday 19th of May

- 09.00 Departure from Joensuu by bus
16.00 Arrival in Petrozavodsk from Joensuu
City tour by bus (45-60 min)
19.00-21.00 Get together cocktail party, "Welcome to Petrozavodsk" (Hotel Park Inn by Radisson)

Tuesday 20th of May (Karelian Branch of RANEP, Petrozavodsk | Address: Ulitsa Chapayeva 6A)

- 09.20-09.30 Guided walk to the academy from Hotel Park Inn
09.30-10.00 Registration
10.00-11.00 Opening ceremony
- Raija Komppula, Professor, University of Eastern Finland
- Elvira Pavlova, Professor, Director, Karelian Institute of Tourism
- Valeri Kiryanov, Chairman of the State Committee of the Republic of Karelia for Tourism
- Galina Shirshina, Head of Petrozavodsk Urban District
- Yevgeniy Trofimov, Professor, Rector of the Russian International Academy for Tourism
- Pirjo Tulokas, Consul General, Consulate General of Finland, St. Petersburg
11.00-12.00 Keynote presentation I
Ethno-cultural tourism as a factor of regional development
Yevgeniy Trofimov, Rector of the Russian International Academy for Tourism
12.00-12.15 Coffee break
12.15-13.15 Keynote presentation II
The challenges and opportunities for rural tourism development
William C. Gartner, Professor, University of Minnesota
13.15-14.30 Lunch
14.30-15.30 Parallel sessions I
15.30-15.45 Coffee break
15.45-17.45 Parallel sessions II
20.00- Dinner (Hotel Park Inn by Radisson)

Wednesday 21st of May (Karelian Branch of RANEP, Petrozavodsk | Address: Ulitsa Chapayeva 6A)

- 9.00-10.00 Keynote presentation III
Museum "Kizhi" in the system of cultural and rural tourism in terms of development of rural territories
Natalia Drobaha, Kizhi Museum
10.00-11.00 Keynote presentation IV
Using rural tourism as a tool for regeneration and conservation: Issues and experiences
Bernard Lane, Visiting Professor at Leeds Metropolitan University
11.00-12.00 Parallel sessions III
12.00-12.15 Coffee break
12.15-13.45 Parallel sessions IV
13.45-14.45 Lunch
14.45-16.15 Parallel sessions V
16.15-16.30 Coffee break
16.30-18.30 RUNAT session
20.00- Official conference dinner (Hotel Park Inn by Radisson)
Dress code: Smart casual

Thursday 22nd of May

Breakfast at the hotel / check-out

- 08.10 Bus transportation to the harbor
08.45 Boat trip to Kizhi Island
10.40 Arrival in Kizhi Island - excursion on Kizhi
14.00 Boat trip back to Petrozavodsk
15.15 Arrival in Petrozavodsk, lunch
16.15 Bus transportation to Joensuu
18.00 Post tour to St. Petersburg (optional/not included in the conference fee).
Departure at PTZ railway station

PARALLEL SESSION I | Tuesday 20th May

| TIME | ROOM A Chair: Prof. William C. Gartner Presentations in English |
|-------------|---|
| 14.30-15.00 | Segmenting sport tourists based on the importance of destination sport infrastructure and activities offered in rural winter sport destinations <i>Kirstin Hallmann, Sabine Müller, Christoph Breuer & Magnus Metz</i> |
| 15.00-15.30 | Tourist experiences with zero Inclusive <i>Kari Jæger & Kjell Olsen</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION II | Tuesday 20th May

| TIME | ROOM A Chair: Dr. Hilka Lassila Presentations in English |
|-------------|--|
| 15.45-16.15 | Customer insight as a driving force for development of sustainability elements in rural tourism <i>Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen, Anne Matilainen & Jorma Asunta</i> |
| 16.15-16.45 | „Albergo Diffuso sostenibile“ – Prospects for a sustainable development of the Albergo Diffuso in Italy <i>Christian Nordhorn</i> |
| 16.45-17.15 | Finnish micro entrepreneurs' perceptions of sustainability issues in rural tourism <i>Petra Blinnikka, Anja Härkönen, Hanna-Maija Väisänen & Minna Tunkkari-Eskelinen</i> |
| 17.15-17.45 | Cultural tourism and poverty alleviation - the case of Kilimanjaro rural communities in Tanzania <i>Wineaster Anderson & Fredrick Salieli Makundi</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION III | Wednesday 21st May

| TIME | ROOM A Chair: Prof. Raija Kompula Session commentator: Dagmar Lane Presentations in English |
|-------------|---|
| 11.00-11.30 | Regional food production and its effect on rural tourism development – the case of Bavarian Jura <i>Daniel Zacher & Harald Pechlaner</i> |
| 11.30-12.00 | Evaluating relationship between farmer's identity and managerial efficiency of dairy farms that conduct educational tourism <i>Yasuo Ohe</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION IV | Wednesday 21st May

| TIME | ROOM A Chair: Dr. Tarja Kupiainen Presentations in English |
|-------------|---|
| 12.15-12.45 | K3 Catskiing: Diversifying a livelihood and community through tourism <i>Rob Hood</i> |
| 12.45-13.15 | Cross-border rural tourism area: a case of Finland and Russian Karelia <i>Natalya Petrova & Nikolay Kolesnikov</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION V | Wednesday 21st May

| TIME | ROOM A Chair: Dr. Kirstin Hallmann Presentations in English |
|-------------|--|
| 14.45-15.15 | Destination design in rural areas <i>Per Strömberg</i> |
| 15.15-15.45 | The influence of administrative structures to destination management in rural areas - the case-study of Schwerin Lake District in Western-Pomerania <i>Heike Bähre, Carmen Chasovschi & Ulrike Fergen</i> |
| 15.45-16.15 | Rural tourism development in mountain regions: Identifying success factors, challenges and potentials <i>Lena-Marie Lun, Harald Pechlaner & Michael Volgger</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION I (Tuesday 20th May)

| TIME | ROOM B Chair: Tamara Glushanok Presentations in Russian with simultaneous interpretation |
|-------------|--|
| 14.30-14.50 | Social and health tourism in Russia <i>Tamara Glushanok & Larisa Serova</i> |
| 14.50-15.10 | Agricultural tourism: theory, practice, development prospects <i>Viktoria Abryandina, Aleksandr Zdorov & Mikhail Zdorov</i> |
| 15.10-15.30 | Development of tourism in Karelia on the base of cultural, social and symbolic capital of the territory <i>Tatyana Sachuk</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION II | Tuesday 20th May

| TIME | ROOM B Chair: Tamara Glushanok Presentations in Russian with simultaneous interpretation |
|-------------|--|
| 15.45-16.15 | Competence-based and practice-oriented approaches in the preparation of the bachelors of tourism <i>Olga Zavyalova & Natalia Dyakova</i> |
| 16.15-16.45 | Tourist potential of ethnic groups of Russians in Karelia <i>Sergey Potakhin, Maria Bogdanova, Svetlana Kapitonova & Natalia Nemceva</i> |
| 16.45-17.15 | Problems of formation of tourist destinations on rural territories in Kondopoga region of Karelia <i>Elena Zlokazova & Larisa Shvets</i> |
| 17.15-17.45 | Regional problems of sustainable development of tourism in rural areas in Russian Federation <i>Rassokhina Tatyana</i> |
| 17.45-18.15 | Environmental education and cultural tourism on the territory of state nature reserve "Kivach" <i>Olga Efimova, Valentina Rotkina-Kachalova & Olga Fomina</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION III | Wednesday 21st May

| TIME | ROOM B Chair: Tatyana Sachuk Presentations in Russian with simultaneous interpretation |
|-------------|---|
| 11.00-11.20 | The problems of the development of rural tourism and the role of the staff training system <i>Oleg Pavlov & Elvira Pavlova</i> |
| 11.20-11.40 | Using the tools of public-private partnership in the tourism sphere <i>Kirill Nikulchenkov</i> |
| 11.40-12.00 | Sustainable tourism development indicators as an aspect of monitoring <i>Valeria Golodyaeva</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION IV | Wednesday 21st May

| TIME | ROOM B Chair: Tatyana Sachuk Presentations in Russian with simultaneous interpretation |
|-------------|--|
| 12.15-12.45 | Features and prospects of the development of rural tourism in the Northern Ladoga <i>Maria Dyakonova & Svetlana Stepanova</i> |
| 12.45-13.15 | Cluster analysis in evaluation of tourism potential of the Republic of Tartastan <i>Niyaz Gabdrakhmanov & Vladimir Rubzov</i> |
| 13.15-13.45 | The marketing destination of the rural tourism in the transborder region of the "Pskov-Livonia" and its main factors <i>Dmitry Melnikov</i> |

PARALLEL SESSION V | Wednesday 21st May

| TIME | ROOM B Chair: Tatyana Sachuk Presentations in Russian with simultaneous interpretation |
|-------------|---|
| 14.45-15.15 | Problems of formation of tourist destinations on rural territories in Kondopoga region of Karelia <i>Elena Zlokazova & Larisa Shvets</i> |
| 15.15-15.45 | Theoretical and methodological support of natural tourism for disabled people: Geoeological aspect <i>Irina Andreeva & Svetlana Cilikina</i> |
| 15.45-16.15 | Designing of tourist objects on the basis of the reconstruction of ancient castles in Ladoga region <i>Aleksandr Fomin</i> |

RUNAT SESSION | Wednesday 21st May

TIME

**ROOM B | Chair: Prof. Raija Komppula
Presentations in English and Russian with simultaneous interpretation**

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 16.30-18.30 | RUNAT project - Product development and development of market insight and e-marketing of rural and nature tourism <i>Satu Karhapää-Puhakka & Oleg Pavlov</i> |
| 16.40-17.00 | The potential Russian rural tourists in the areas of Saint Petersburg and Moscow <i>Jarno Suni</i> |
| 17.00-17.15 | Social media marketing of tourism products through Russian social media channel VKontakte <i>Ekaterina Miettinen</i> |
| 17.15-17.30 | Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation as tourist destination – image, familiarity and interest of travel from the European perspective <i>Jarno Suni</i> |
| 17.30-17.45 | Experiences and results of the training program in the Republic of Karelia <i>Hilkka Lassila, Jorma Korhonen & Keijo Koskinen</i> |
| 17.45-18.00 | Perspectives on the development of tourism and local cooperation in Olonets <i>Lyudmila Babinova</i> |
| 18.00-18.15 | Case: Product development in practice <i>Aleksandr Butin & Natalya Svyazhina</i> |
| 18.15-18.30 | Case: Product development in practice <i>Aleksandr Korzhavin</i> |

Finnish micro entrepreneurs' perceptions of sustainability issues in rural tourism

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism enterprises in Finland are often family-owned, micro sized companies utilizing traditional and local food, culturally valuable surroundings and serving experiences in the clean Finnish nature. Sustainability is essential in tourism as well as in rural tourism, because it has been proved that tourism industry has both negative and positive impacts on environment, culture and society. Also customers appreciate more and more companies that are acting sustainable way.

The entrepreneurs' perceptions of sustainability and related actions in their own rural tourism business was studied in four rural regions in Finland as part of interregional project. The regions were: Central Finland, Päijät-Häme, Häme and Southern Savo. The study focused widely on environmental, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability and how those dimensions are visible in enterprises' business idea, operational environment, business operations, product development, marketing and production of services.

First in spring 2013 it was illustrated how ecological, cultural and social sustainability is linked to different parts of business plan with the help of matrix tool. This matrix served a ground for developing an analysis tools

for thoroughly investigating how different dimensions of sustainability are shown in enterprises business operations. Analysis tools were divided in four phases: a preliminary inquiry to entrepreneurs, a content analysis of the company's marketing communications context, the observation on the premises, as well as entrepreneurs' interview. During the summer 2013 the study was conducted in 30 enterprises.

This paper shows entrepreneurs' perceptions of sustainability in their own rural tourism business at the moment. The results reveal that every dimension is visible in some extent in rural tourism companies. However there are issues that need development like for example communicating the sustainability to customers. Ecological issues are the most visible in companies operations in practice.

Keywords: social, cultural and ecological sustainability, micro enterprises, sustainable tourism

Type of the manuscript: Case study

INTRODUCTION

Finland is, even today, the most rural country in the EU (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2007). Rural areas have always been an essential element of Finnish settlement, production and culture. As well it provides strong natural and cultural elements for tourism development.

Rural tourism in Finland includes cottage holidays, farm holidays, bed and breakfast lodging, farm visits and group catering, organized activity services and holiday villages (Finnish Tourist Board, 1994). Rural tourism plays important role in Finland's tourism sector as a whole. For example in Finland an exceptionally high proportion of accommodation "beds" are located in rural areas (Noev, 2013).

The vision of Finnish rural tourism for 2020 includes several aspects of sustainability (Ministry of Economics and Employment, 2006). This is in line with international definitions e.g. WTO's definition and as well as with the UNEP's and NWTTO's alignments (2005). WTO's simple definition for the sustainable tourism combines the Brundtland Commission's sustainable development definition with tourism:

"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural tourism

Rural tourism is one part of Finnish tourism. It is estimated that there are about 4900 entrepreneurs in rural tourism sector in Finland (Niemi & Ahlstedt, 2013). Typically rural tourism refers to tourism in areas which are sparsely populated. Rural tourism is difficult to define, as there are a variety of terms used to describe tourism activity in rural areas: agritourism, farm tourism, rural tourism, soft tourism and alternative tourism (Carlsen et al., 2010). Rural tourism can take many forms, including bed and breakfasts, self-service accommodation cottages, farm stays or nature activities. The Finnish theme group on tourism defines rural tourism as following: *"The rural tourism is based on the natural resources and reconditions – nature, landscape, culture, human – as well as it is customer oriented tourism business based on the family and small scale entrepreneurship"*. (The Finnish theme group on tourism)

According to a study on the characteristics of rural tourism entrepreneurship in Eastern Finland it seems that the motives for starting a rural business in Finland are in most cases related to existing premises, which make the accommodation or activity services as an opportunity to earn extra income (Komppula, 2004). Frequently the rural tourism business is established to support the main farm business and three fourth of the farmers are part-time tourism entrepreneur (Ryymin, 2008). Only 18% of the businesses use employed workers, whereas 82% operate with family members only (Komppula, 2004).

Sustainability issues in rural tourism

Sustainability is essential in tourism as well as in rural tourism, because it has been proved that tourism industry has both negative and positive impacts on environment, culture and society. Sustainable tourism strives to practices which are for example to be more energy efficient, consume less water, minimize waste, conserve biodiversity, value cultural heritage and traditional values and generate local income (UNEP, 2011).

According to Swarbrooke (1999) small scale rural tourism is type of tourism which is highly compatible with the concept of sustainable tourism. Other type of tourism that Swarbrooke (1999) sees as sustainable is cultural tourism which involves visitors learning about the history and culture of an area. Cultural aspects might be quite easily implemented in rural tourism surroundings. Typically rural tourism entrepreneurs operate in their farm or in old buildings. It is ecologically and culturally sustainable to convert the old farm buildings into tourism usage. In the same time this action may preserve a culturally valuable building and their surroundings. Rural companies can

implement the diversity of local cultural resources in activities for tourists and preserve the heritage for following generations. (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005; Halme & Fadeeva, 2001)

The issues relating to ecological sustainability can be implemented in the rural tourism enterprise in several ways. Conservation in the area may mean protecting the valuable plant or animal species. Efficiency in resources is gained by installing water-efficient fittings in showers and toilets, and using renewable energy. Recycling is achieved ensuring that all recyclable materials are collected and delivered for recycling, and the organic waste is composted. (Lim & McAleer, 2005; Carlsen et al., 2001)

In product development the sustainability can be taken in consideration in many ways. The environmental issues should be considered in activities for customer like fishing, hiking, boating. Particularly in areas of sensitive ecosystem. (Lim & McAleer, 2005) Activities in rural tourism may utilize the cultural elements from rural customs and folklore, or from local and family traditions. Tourists taking part to the cultural activities are informed about the culture. This will strengthen rural community's own traditions, heritage, arts, lifestyles, places, and this all is preserved between generations. The co-operation between rural tourist companies, local enterprises and community in activity and event production increases the commitment to preserve and to provide knowledge on traditions and folklore that in turn helps to enhance the tourist experience. (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003) The very essence of rural tourism is local cooperation and community involvement through appropriate forms of networking, arguable one of the most important requirements of rural tourism (Mitchell & Hall 2005).

Some have argued that small tourism organizations face particular constraints upon their ability to respond positively to the environmental challenge for example because of the lack of resources (Bramwell et al., 1996) or interest to prioritize profitability over environmental issues (Middleton, 1998; RDC et al., 1995). Some also support the contention that small business owners may be particularly concerned to ensure that tourism development is sustainable (Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003). However, given that rural tourism relies heavily on environmental attractiveness and healthy outdoor pursuits, it might be expected that tourism and hospitality operators would be especially motivated to adopt sustainable development practices (Carlsen et al., 2001). In some areas the role of rural tourism is to support the preservation of the rural nature and landscape (Fons et al., 2011).

Sustainability in tourism destination is often assessed and monitored by using different kinds of indicators developed for need of global, national and local level tourism industry or certain type of tourism (Jokimäki & Kuismanlahti-Jokimäki, 2007; Schianetz & Kavanagh, 2008; Roberts & Tribe, 2008; WTO, 2005; CAPA, 2011). One approach to illustrate and evaluate the sustainability in micro-sized company level is to investigate how different dimensions of sustainability are shown in enterprises business operations.

As Dewhurst and Thomas (2003) stated there remains a need to further investigate the “reality” of the way in which small tourism firms perceive their role in sustainable tourism. This study illustrates the reality among thirty Finnish rural tourism enterprises.

Used methods and implementation of the case study

The aim of this paper is to illustrate by using the analysis done in 30 microenterprises within rural tourism in Finland how cultural, social and ecological sustainability is implemented in the rural tourism enterprises business operations, product development and communications according the entrepreneurs’ own perceptions of sustainability in their own rural tourism business at the moment.

Cultural, social and ecological sustainability in micro companies within rural tourism was studied in four rural regions in Finland as part of ongoing interregional project, KESMA II (2013-2014). Project is funded by the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund through the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for Central Finland (ELY).

Four regions of the study were: Central Finland (Keski-Suomi), Päijät-Häme Region (Päijät-Häme), Häme-Region (Kanta-Häme) and Southern Savonia (Etelä-Savo) (Figure 1).

In spring 2013 it was illustrated how ecological, cultural and social sustainability is linked to different parts of business plan with the help of matrix tool. The matrix served a ground for developing an analysis tools for thoroughly investigating how different dimensions of sustainability are shown in enterprises business operations. Vertical axis consisted dimensions of sustainability: cultural, social and ecological. Horizontal axis contained different parts of business plan.



Figure 1. The study regions

After demonstrating the sustainability dimensions and their connections to business plan, the questions were framed into four different forms, which served an opportunity to analyze the enterprise and its sustainability. Analysis tools were divided in four phases: a preliminary questionnaire to entrepreneurs, a content analysis of the company's website, the observation on the premises, as well as entrepreneurs' interview.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the companies' premises during summer and autumn 2013. Interview was semi-structured and divided into eight sections based on business plan: physical operational environment of the company, cooperation and communality, business idea, customers, marketing, product development, production and control and human resources. At the same visit the observation of the premises was also implemented. The preliminary questionnaire was sent to the entrepreneurs via email before the visit. Content analysis of the company's website was done before the visit by the project group. The data was coded to Digium program, and analysed by

classifying and quantifying method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Physical operational environment of the companies

Natural environment of the companies is diverse comprising water ways and forests. Half of the entrepreneurs mentioned also that there are swamps in the immediate surroundings and also rare plants have been found. Two of three of the enterprises told that there are protected natural areas and traditional landscape nearby or on the entrepreneurs' land.

The environment/surroundings of the companies make it possible to use renewable energy sources (like wood, water power, ground heat, wind power, solar energy), and quite many also utilize this opportunity.

Entrepreneurs were asked how culture of the region and its special features are shown in their operations. Half of the respondents mentioned that you can see it in the landscape and nature, which is typical for the region. Seven of the respondents mentioned food culture and traditions. Three of the respondents were not originally from that region, so it was hard for them to answer to the question. Three stated that regions culture or other special features are not visible in their operations.

Accessibility in rural tourism enterprises is a challenging part of social sustainability. Accessibility is not so easily implemented because of the fact that the premises that entrepreneurs use in their business operations are quite often old and also valuable culturally, sometimes also protected, so their remodeling to be accessible is not always possible.

Cooperation and communality

Communality is seen as an important part of normal living in the countryside according to the entrepreneurs. In one case, the communality plays big role in company's business idea: *"In our company, the communality is the core of all service products"*. The neighbors and village community are important to most of the entrepreneurs and they participate actively to the events and voluntary work for the community they belong to. It was worth noticing, that entrepreneurs take very actively part in all kinds of development projects: they are both target group and active players. As members of the local community, small firm owners need to feel that they are part of and not separate from the local management of the area (Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003) as it was also indicated with these companies studied.

Networking and cooperation with other companies is very beneficial for micro enterprises. Many of companies interviewed have different types of networks and entrepreneurs were very open for all kind of new cooperation.

Though some enterprises suffered lack of cooperation and found hard to find suitable partners. The entrepreneurs require transparency, good communication, reliability, commitment and effective cooperation from their partners. The most important stakeholders for the investigated companies were customers (22), banks and sponsors (19), other companies and subcontractors (15), environment (13), neighbors and the local community (12), employees (9), experts and consultants (9). Obviously the order of importance of the stakeholders varies in accordance with the company's operations and lifecycle. Almost all of the companies are already cooperating with their competitors somehow, for example by recommending their services to the customers, marketing together, borrowing or lending equipment etc. The commitment to support local suppliers has been connected to business owners responsible to sustainability (Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003). The interviewed companies regarded that they have positive impacts particularly on the community's economic. In literature the small tourism entrepreneurs' ability to create economic growth in the region is generally argued to be constrained (Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000).

Business idea and sustainability

For the majority of respondents tourism is only one form of business. Most companies have other business operations, like farming, animal husbandry, forestry. Usually entrepreneurs are trying to expand their business operations to accommodation or catering to stabilize their economy. Some of the companies were family farms, which had been handed down over the years from generation to generation. This is very typical characteristic of rural tourism entrepreneurship in Finland (Komppula, 2004). Some of the entrepreneurs had made a fresh start by making investments (construction of cottages, buildings) and planning what kind of business operations buildings and surroundings could offer for them and for their customers. This can be called as lifestyle and locational preferences which has been found to be motives to establish tourism business in rural areas (Carlsen et al. 2001).

Most of the (90 %) respondents agree that different aspects of sustainability are visible in enterprises' business ideas. The examples of the previous were: appreciating the nature and locality, using local food, services and workforce, renovating old buildings, recycling, participating to community building, using local culture, history etc. in tourism products, saving energy and water and making sure that the business itself is economically also sustainable. It seems that the economic goals are not contradict the sustainable action, which has been found to be typical for small tourism owners (Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003).

Customers and seasons

One of the most important customer group almost in each companies was families (21). Half of the companies mentioned especially international tourists as one of the top three customers groups. Companies having meetings are important customer group for 12 of the interviewed enterprises. The main season is summer (May-August) with on average 50 % of the customers. Though winter is very significant season for Finnish tourism industry, the interviewed companies named winter (January-April) as the least important season.

Marketing

Internet is the most important marketing channel for companies, and also the most common channel for customers to find company. Unfortunately, it is common that webpages don't highlight sustainability factors. Also grapevine e.g Facebook, Twitter, is important marketing method; satisfied customers tell to the potential customers about the company and its services.

Entrepreneurs feel that ecological sustainability is quite well seen in their marketing communication, however social sustainability dimension should be more emphasized. Half of the enterprises tell in their website how the energy that they use is generated, almost half tell also where they acquire the foodstuffs they use.

Mostly sustainability is conveyed by the pictures or colors in the webpages. Finnish rural tourism companies use very often pictures of nature (landscape with lake), the farm buildings, cottages, and families, if the services are focused on that segment. The colors are from nature or the surrounding buildings. Rural entrepreneurs bring out the sustainability in the text. They may tell about their values, the history of the farm or the buildings, details about the nature, the use of local food or other resources and the availability of local services.

Product development and production

Almost all of the companies utilize at some extent elements of history and traditions of the farm/village/region in their product development. Also, natural environment and traditional landscapes are utilized as part of companies' services. However, elements could be used much more. Stories and tales are used in some extent but there is a need to implement storytelling as part of the services even more. Stories and tales usually tell about location, buildings and, in some cases, the history of owner-family. These are the same elements as companies use in picturing sustainability. Many entrepreneurs would like to develop this further and see it as important part of cultural sustainability.

All companies use energy conservation lamps in their premises, but the coverage compared to normal lamps vary from company to company. Entrepreneurs are quite active in recycling: all of the companies recycle in some level, and require that also from their customers. The recycling is one of the most often undertook environmental practices in rural tourism businesses (Carlsen et al., 2001). Most of the companies have made ecologically sustainable choices in their buildings, heating systems and waste water systems. They try actively to save energy, water and natural resources but necessarily their customers are not well enough informed how to participate to that. Entrepreneurs are aware that they need to inform and guide their customers better.

Human resources

Most of the companies did not have a lot of external workforce, duties are carried out by the owner couple. Yearly and regular basis companies employ fulltime only 1,07 persons, but they use seasonal workforce and part-time workers. Sustainability policy is important part of the orientation of new employers; they are told about the history of company and of course, sustainable practice. The low use of employed workers is typical feature for Finnish rural tourism companies (Komppula, 2004). For these kinds of companies it is vital that the family members have the possibility also to take time off and relax, because the whole business is mainly carried out by the couple and it is, without a doubt, a challenging situation and requires a lot of commitment, hard work and flexibility.

| The issue of sustainability (connected to business plan) | Entrepreneur's perception of the state of sustainability |
|---|--|
| <i>Physical operational environment of the companies</i> | On entrepreneurs' land or nearby are protected natural areas, traditional landscape, rare plants. |
| <i>Cooperation and communality</i> | Many companies have different types of networks, and entrepreneurs were very open for all kind of new cooperation even with competitors. They participate actively to the events and voluntary work for the community they belong to. |
| <i>Business idea and sustainability</i> | In most cases the business is established to support the main farm business. 90 % (27) of the respondents agree that different aspects of sustainability are visible in enterprises' business ideas. Examples: appreciating the nature and locality, using local food, services and workforce, renovating old buildings and keeping them alive, using local culture, history etc. in tourism products. |
| <i>Customers and seasons</i> | The most important customer group in almost each one of the companies was families. The main season is summer. |
| <i>Marketing</i> | Internet is the most important marketing channel. The sustainability factors that are mentioned in internet pages most often are energy source, history of the farm, details about nature, use of local food, availability of local services. |
| <i>Product development and production</i> | Almost all of the companies utilize at some extent elements of history and traditions of the farm/village/region in their product development. Also, natural environment and traditional landscapes are utilized as part of companies' services. Entrepreneurs are quite active in recycling. Most of the companies have made ecologically sustainable choices in their buildings, heating systems and waste water systems. |
| <i>Human resources</i> | Most of the companies have only little external workforce, duties are carried out mostly by the owner couple. |

Table 1. The state of sustainability in 30 micro rural tourism companies according the entrepreneur's perception.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism companies are surrounded by nature and rural landscape, which is clearly one strength of Finnish rural tourism. The companies utilize special features of natural and cultural environment in their business. This is how the companies preserve the special cultural features of the region and their own farm also to the future. In most cases the rural enterprise is owned by family. Family business as a type of ownership exhibits the reverence of continuity, which enhances cultural sustainability. Stories, myths and tales linked to these feature could be used even more in their business and especially in their product development.

It can be concluded that rural tourism micro companies have put effort on the ecological dimension of sustainability. In future companies could put more effort to cultural and social dimension and utilize those dimensions in their business. For example, communality, and service products based on stories could be good marketing advantages for companies.

The companies save the energy, water and natural resources. This could be reinforced by informing and guiding the customers to participate in the saving. If the customers are informed all the advantages which are achieved by saving natural resources, it is likely that they will obey the instructions of saving natural resources. "If you do", you achieve this is better way to inform than "please do not".

Internet is the most important marketing channel for companies. Unfortunately, it is common that webpages do not highlight sustainability factors. The companies could tell much more about the sustainability issues they are contributing. Maybe some of those issues are so obvious that companies are not aware of the value of stating that. It is important that companies will include sustainability in their marketing communication, because in future it customers will pay more attention on sustainability.

Sustainability analysis tools used in this study revealed quite profoundly the present state of cultural, social and ecological sustainability of the rural tourism companies. However, because this tool was used the first time, further development and testing is still needed. Business plan as a framework for analyzing company's sustainability makes it possible to really cover whole business to the analysis and reveals well the development needs of the company.

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The influence of administrative structures to destination management in rural areas - the case-study of Schwerin Lake District in Western-Pomerania

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ABSTRACT

Tourist destinations are subject to constant change. Due to their often antiquated structures, especially rural regions soon reach their limits on their way to meet tomorrow's needs. Restructuring efforts entail both opportunities and challenges. On the basis of conventional destination management models, Schweriner Seenlandschaft (Schwerin Lake District) in Western Pomerania, Germany is analysed as a case in point. Schweriner Seenlandschaft is a target area currently hampered by particular traditional administrative structures and the resulting political and administrative constraints on its development in Eastern Germany after German re-unification nearly 25 years ago. The analysis of this region, its general underlying conditions, its structures and the resulting barriers to development yields opportunities to overcome such confines and obstacles, notably for tourist destinations in rural areas.

Keywords: Administrative structures, destination management in rural areas, rural tourism, Western-Pomerania.

Type of manuscript: Case study.

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas in Europe are often characterized by specific features which present great challenges:

- They are often structurally weak areas with weak or inadequate infrastructure.
- Demographic change results in internal migration, accelerating the depopulation of rural areas (= migration from rural areas due to the absence of attractive job opportunities, while on the other hand there is a shortage of skilled workers in key social or medical fields).

According to the German government's demography report, "villages and minor cities in peripheral rural areas, as well as some structurally weak urban areas, are affected by depopulation and aging, creating great challenges, particularly for economic development and with respect to securing a skilled worker base in certain sectors of the economy. This is true above all for large areas of eastern Germany. West German areas will face similar difficulties in their future demographic development" (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2011, p. 171). The associated shortage of skilled workers is a major problem for Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, a German State in the territory of former East Germany which was created after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Regional infrastructure planning in rural areas faces the challenge of ensuring the supply of basic services to the public, overcoming barriers and providing access to public transportation despite the depopulation of these areas. In its tourism marketing efforts, the State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania focuses on new vacation forms, such as self-discovery vacations, mental wellness and nature tourism. With research and economic assistance from the State government, and the involvement of the European structural funds, the plan is to combine the various counties (Landkreise) of the State, particularly the rural districts, into "health destinations." This effort is being made despite the fact that, in many areas, positive destination development in rural Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania is hindered by inadequate know-how, a growth in redundant and ineffective organizational structures and inadequate infrastructure. On the other hand, rural areas often have very strong basic conditions, attractive landscapes and a high potential for natural recreation, making them attractive for rural tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism in rural space nowadays is much more dynamic in forms and themes, as the “classical” alternative from some decades ago, when the tourists were specially attracted by natural environment and rural culture. Lane 1994 (see also Frochot 2005, Molera & Albaladejo 2007) stated that this multi-faceted characteristic renders a definition problematic but nevertheless identifies four criteria to qualify rural tourism:

1. tourism taking place in rural areas,
2. to respect the specificities of rural side (rural heritage, space characteristics, etc.),
3. rural in scale (usually implying small scale) and
4. representing the complex pattern of the rural world (environment, economy, history and location).”

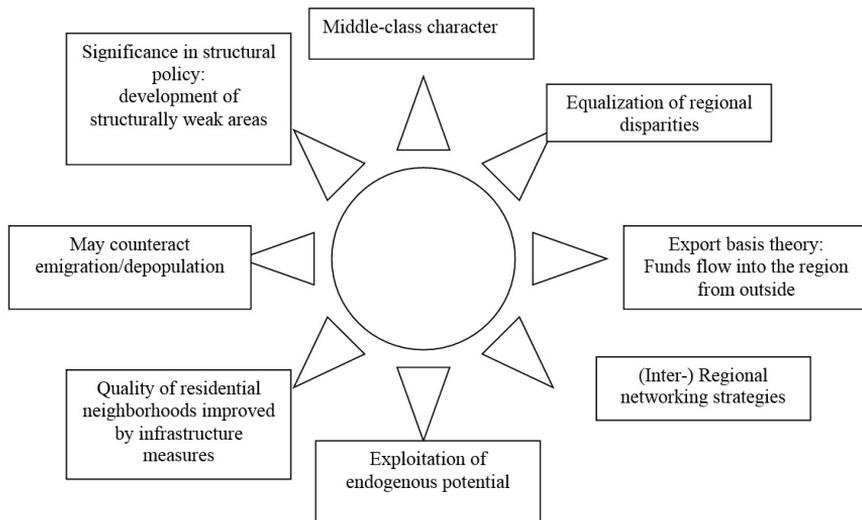


Figure 1. Regiopolitical Aspects of Destinations in Tourism Policy and Business Development

The above diagram provides an overview of the features and tourism and economic policy goals which apply for many rural areas, including the rural environment of the Schwerin Lake District. According to Cawley & Gillmor (2008, 317), rural tourism depends on “a range of publicly and privately owned natural and cultural resources, associated infrastructure, and interpretative facilities, as well as provision of accommodation, food, beverages, and goods. Unless appropriately regulated, threats can arise to the quality of the physical environment, social structures, and cultures arising from the types and scale of development and the numbers of tourists attracted.”

Cole explained in detail that there is a synergy between the natural and the artificial components within a tourism destination, a synergy that could assure the attractiveness of a destination (suitable accommodation, transportation, recreational opportunities, dining facilities, and so on) (see Cole, 2012, 1130). "Fundamental cross-destination processes and strategies need to be managed and developed. This ideally requires overarching structures"(according to Berger, 2012, 30). It will be necessary to view the destination area's coordinated and bundled offerings as a competitive unit, and to manage them as a strategic business unit as well (see Bieger & Beritelli, 2013).

Research design, methodology and methods for the analysis of the Schwerin Lake District as a rural area

The starting point for the present study is the Schwerin Lake District, in the western part of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. This district is comprised of the State capital, Schwerin, and nearby municipalities. The key link for these municipalities is Germany's third-largest lake, Lake Schwerin, with a surface of about 62 square kilometres. The landscape is characterized by numerous forests, meadows, lakes and swamps, as well as nature reserves and bird sanctuaries. The tourism profile of the Schwerin Lake District includes a wide range of accommodations, from hostels and vacation homes to fine hotels and certified campgrounds and villas. The number of overnight stays was 660,000 in the year 2011, evenly divided between Schwerin, the capital city, and the surrounding area. The Schwerin Lake District's potential as a multi-faceted cultural and natural space is a USP which should be further developed and expanded. What is lacking at the moment is a bundling of the cultural offerings (castles, manors, theatres) with the natural advantages of the surrounding Lake District in such a way as to attract guests and to take advantage of the existing potential. The area surrounding the State capital of Schwerin, the Schwerin Lake District, which is the subject of this study, exhibits the key features of rural areas mentioned above. An acute need for discussion and action on the part of tourism actors was created by the administrative reorganization in the year 2012 and the announcement by the County of Northwest Mecklenburg that it will be withdrawing from the Mecklenburg-Schwerin Tourism Association in the year 2014. This situation compelled the Association to revise and adapt its management within its sphere of responsibility. A student project was undertaken in order to identify deficiencies in destination management specific to development, especially with respect to administrative structure. This study, from the year 2012, revealed that the problems relate above all to administrative boundaries, which are standing in the way of better tourism development and marketing (see Bähre, Fergen, & Kluth, 2013, 68-70). The specific nature of these boundaries and the obstacles which they create for tourism development will be explained below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysed situation

Often, destination areas are not defined and viewed from the guest's viewpoint. Rather, the existing hierarchically operating destination management organizations (DMOs) often act along the lines of the centralized spheres of responsibility (co-) financed by the relevant government authority. This conflict appears to be especially problematic for regions with a rural character. It is clear from the theoretical and empirical study of the "Schwerin Lake District" that the need for systematic and structured destination management has yet to be realized by many of the relevant actors.

Well-established tourism research and sciences make the case that it is vital above all to adapt destination areas to guests' needs and, building on this, to create a DMO as an overarching structure for the "Schwerin Lake District" destination area from the guest's viewpoint. The challenge of the establishing such a DMO which is oriented towards the needs of current and potential guests is not limited to gaining the acceptance and trust of the primarily small and mid-sized actors and getting them to work together. Given the large number of tourism actors and the overlapping activities of the various organizations, a need for restructuring in the destination area is also evident. At the moment, the existing organizations act independently in their decision-making and do not maintain any hierarchical relationship with one another. In addition, the territory is defined not from the guest's perspective, but based on administrative expense and administrative structures.

Something else the region lacks at the moment is an overall tourism mission statement to indicate the frame of action and strategic orientation of the regional actors. In the future, it will be essential to create synergy effects, and not merely because of the limited annual marketing budget and staffing shortages at the various institutions. As a result, there is a need to intensify the collaboration of all those involved in the process. This goal will have to be pursued with even greater energy if the county of Northwest Mecklenburg withdraws from the Mecklenburg-Schwerin Tourism Association (Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Schwerin e.V.) in 2014, depriving the organization of revenues in the amount of one staffing position. If that happens, the Association will also be responsible for a smaller territory, so that the upper end of the Schwerin Lake District will no longer receive any official consideration. Given the limited financial capacities of some institutions and the (associated) staffing shortage, opportunities for optimization are apparent above all in the areas of service quality and expertise.

RESULTS

Based on existing expertises which have been developed for the region, a student analysis of the organizational structures of the Schwerin Lake District from a destination management perspective was prepared in 2012. This results of this analysis were as follows:

- The Lake District is a destination area with different products, in terms of Schwerin and the surrounding area.
- The deficiencies lie in administrative limitations, which decisively inhibit tourism development.
- The division of the destination area into small parts, as well as the absence of centralized coordination and consultation among those involved in the management process, represent a clear management deficiency.
- While the State capital is marketed by Stadtmarketing GmbH Schwerin in conjunction with the City government, the Schweriner Seenland Tourism Association (Tourismusverein Schweriner Seenland e.V.) is responsible for all of the surrounding area. For years, they have acted independently of one another. These two actors have been operating without any coordination or reference to one another, making it substantially more difficult to convey a consistent overall profile of the Lake District to guests.
- Relations between the city and the surrounding area have been hardened by sensitivities, and this must be viewed as a major negative factor.
- The Mecklenburg-Schwerin Tourism Association (Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Schwerin e.V.) can be cited as another actor in the management of the region. This organization is responsible for tourism management for all of western Mecklenburg. However, given the high complexity of the task and the heterogeneity of the areas within its scope of management, the Association has reached the limits of its capacity with respect to the development of strategy and tourism offerings.

These structural deficiencies, caused by overlapping spheres of responsibility and activity, are a decisive reason for the inadequate coordination and implementation of past concepts, such as the regional water tourism concept for the Schwerin Lake District from the year 2005. A key field of action for such concepts is consistent strategic orientation and marketing for the chosen region. To this day, however, the Schwerin Lake District lacks a substantive profile and a consistent image, including advertising media (e.g. brochures, websites) portraying the tourism profile of the Lake District as a whole. The two tourism associations and Stadtmarketing GmbH each produce their own brochures, lists of accommodations, etc., for their respective spheres of responsibility, with difference references to the Schwerin Lake District. Revising the existing print materials and creating new ones which portray the Lake District as a single destination area is a laborious process, and one which requires the development of new financing models above all. Even the name of the "Schwerin Lake District" area is not always communicated consistently. For example,

the Schweriner Seenland Tourism Association (Tourismusverein Schweriner Seenland e.V.) identifies the area as both “*Schweriner Seenlandschaft*” [the Schwerin Lake District] and “*Schweriner Seenland*” [Schwerin Lake Country]. As can be immediately ascertained by means of a Google search, this lack of clarity not infrequently creates confusion among guests, and is indicative of inadequate marketing expertise.

Not only does the existence of various spheres of responsibility which is addressed above make it more difficult to market the destination area as a single unit, but conflicts are also created by administrative boundaries. For example, Lake Schwerin borders various counties (Ludwigslust-Parchim, Northwest Mecklenburg and the City of Schwerin). As a result, the coordination of infrastructure measures in the destination area quickly reaches the limits of its capacity where the counties involved have different interests and maintain different areas of emphasis with respect to regional development. This has a detrimental effect in particular on the maintenance and extension of bicycle paths and hiking trails around Lake Schwerin, the posting of highway signs and the creation of new lakeside facilities. Also lacking is a comprehensive approach, such as a tourism concept for the Schwerin Lake District destination area, for consolidating and expanding existing regional subconcepts, such as the “Integrated Regional Development Concept for the East Bank of Lake Schwerin,” the tourism concept for the City of Schwerin and the regional water tourism concept for the Schwerin lakes, as well as developing strategies, facilitating product development, and ultimately contributing to regional profiling. If the current management of the Schwerin Lake District are placed in relation to the four functions of destination management organizations (DMOs), the redundant structures and overlapping tourism activities are clearly evident and can be rightly criticized.

| | State capital City of Schwerin (city administration) | Stadtmarketing GmbH Schwerin (city marketing) | Schweriner Seenland e.V. (Schwerin Lake Country tourism association) | Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Schwerin e.V. (Mecklenburg-Schwerin tourism association) |
|----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Planning function | X | X | | X |
| Function of supply | | X | | |
| Interest representation function | X | | X | X |
| Marketing function | X | X | X | X |

Figure 2. Functions of Destination Management according to the engaged partner organisations of the Schwerin Lake District (Bähre, Fergen, & Kluth, 2013, 68, translated)

Such redundant structures and overlapping based on administrative boundaries, which are associated with areas for which no organizations or more than one organizations are responsible, are frequently encountered (see Bähre, Fergen, & Kluth, 2013, 68). As is clearly evident from the table, there are overlaps in marketing activities above all. This relates e.g. to the circulation of brochures and websites. While there may be overlaps in some cases, in others tasks are not performed at all, e.g. with respect to profile building and strategic alignment of the destination area. At the moment, these key destination management functions are not being performed by any of the actors mentioned. The same is true for product development and eventization/experience profiling for the region as a whole.

The significance of inter-sector networks in destination management for regions with a rural character

The potential for optimization shown is large. Development-specific potential lies in the overcoming of these administrative boundaries and in process-oriented management and marketing. Accordingly, the challenge of overcoming this deficient situation is seen to be transformation of the current management system and the creation of a management model which spans administrative boundaries. A model which coordinates the activities of the actors in the Schwerin Lake District, views and manages the region as a single destination area, and engages in marketing along those lines.

Accordingly, the obstacles to development described can be minimized through structural reformation. This would create the opportunity not only to manage and market the Schwerin Lake District in its entirety in the future, but also to better combine existing services and expertise through network and cooperation management. A USP based on the region's potential as a natural and cultural space, shaped into relevant tourist offers, would make the region significantly more attractive. This, in turn, would increase the length of the average stay. The potential for development from structural transformation presented above depends above all on coordination components. Especially in light of the globalized and changing market conditions, with "hybrid" consumers alternating between consumption of experiences and products, and with dynamic distribution structures as a result of technological developments, this change in management focus certainly represents a challenge as well as an opportunity for destinations with a rural character, such as the Schwerin Lake District. If the restructuring of the Schwerin Lake District is viewed as an opportunity and if the (re-) organization is realized in line with the guiding principle formulated in Beritelli, Bieger and Laesser (2011), "structure follows process follows strategy," the first step would be to investigate the existing networking processes of the actors involved and to develop existing potential. This should lead to the utilization of private-

public partnership-based marketing facilitation mix concepts, as pointed out by Middleton et al. (2009).

CONCLUSIONS

Accordingly, it has become clear that the opportunity to promote tourism in the analysed rural areas lies in overcoming two kinds of “boundaries,” specifically:

- administrative boundaries; and
- economic sector boundaries.

With respect to overcoming the boundaries of economic sectors, there are good examples from Germany, e.g. culinary tourism and the partnership of the tourism industry with regional marketing e.g. of farms, vineyards and breweries. The Thuringian Forest (Thuringian sausage), Spreewald (Spreewald gherkins) and Wadden Sea (Wattwurm sausage) should be mentioned as examples in this regard. The growing importance of regional inter-sector partnerships is evident from the increasing number of regions in which partnerships have formed between the tourism and health care industries in light of developments in health care and demographic change. In rural areas in particular, there are opportunities for development within the context of inter-sector networks, depending on regional infrastructure, which can benefit actors and tourists as well as residents. In light of this infrastructure, a partnership between the tourism, cultural and agricultural sectors, water-based natural potential and the health care industry would appear promising for the examined region, the Schwerin Lake District. To this end, the organization of the destination must be adapted in a flexible, process-oriented and profile-appropriate manner to meet the needs of globalized markets, hybrid consumers and strained municipal budgets. In other words, destination management must be performed in target group-specific fashion as network organization. A two-sided approach is to be followed in this regard:

- on the one hand, securing stable basic financing from business development/public institutions; and
- on the other hand, generating private-public partnership projects, integrating the marketing facilitation mix, which can more flexibly meet the needs of consumer markets (see Bähre, Fergen, & Kluth, 2013, 73-74.)

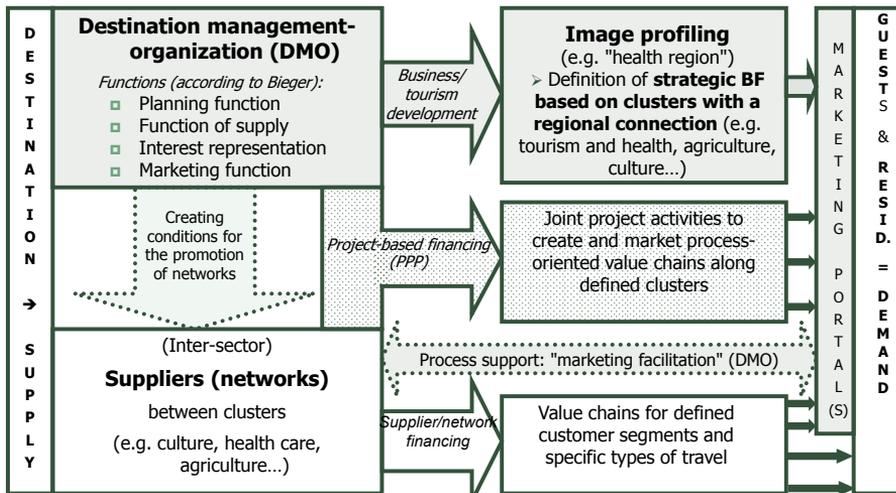


Figure 3. The Role of the Destination Management Organisation as a Project Management Organisation at the Intersection of Inter-Sector Regional Networks (Bähre, Fergen, & Kluth, 2013, 74, translated)

An overarching destination management organization can market the naturally contiguous territory of the Schwerin Lake District from the viewpoint of defined clusters (such as culture, health, etc.) in the manner of a jointly financed project unit. The funding for image profiling and advertising of the destination (Holloway et al., 2009), possibly including the development of infrastructure in the destination, should come from basic financing (e.g. from municipal budgets, such as business development funds). If this transformation process succeeds, and existing organizational structures are converted into a cooperative destination management organization operating in a process-oriented manner and independent of current administrative boundaries, the overcoming of administrative boundaries triggered by this process will result in the elimination of other limitations and obstacles to tourism development in the rural “Schwerin Lake District” area (see Bähre, Fergen, & Kluth, 2013, 74). This project management aspect needs to be firmly anchored in the region. Customer-oriented product lines and value chains along the defined clusters, on the other hand, can be project-financed and cooperatively marketed. In addition, the necessary conditions should be created to enable the actors to form networks in a flexible and market-appropriate fashion, as well as developing and independently marketing qualitative value chains.

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Segmenting sport tourists based on added value through infrastructure and activities offered in rural winter sport destinations

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ABSTRACT

Research on segmenting winter sports tourists is very scant, although the winter sports holiday industry is one of the best known specific form of sport tourism travel (Weed & Bull, 2004). Surprisingly the segmentation study of Dolnicar and Leisch (2003) seems to be the only segmentation approach taking into account several winter sports activities, like skiing, snowboarding, or sledding, besides other behavioral and psychographic criteria. Studies integrating different sports and analyzing what adds value to the tourist's experience seem to be rare. The purpose of the study was to segment winter sports tourists according to their interests and appreciation of added value offers based on special infrastructure and events offered by the destination.

A quantitative research design was chosen. A survey was conducted in 11 winter sports destinations in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Data was collected with regard to perceived added value such as existence of snow-

parks, activities like snow kiting and free riding, special events and a fit between events and the destination. The final sample size amounted to $n=3,767$. Based on the added value variables, the sample was clustered into three groups, namely *Relaxed*, *Casuals*, and *Enthusiasts*. The last group rated the added value variables highest. The clusters were tested for differences with regard to involvement with activities, trip characteristics and socio-demographics. The χ^2 -statistics revealed significant differences for all clusters and the variables tested.

The results revealed can be used for product development of alpine destinations to create tailor made offerings for the three clusters. For example, enthusiasts had the highest interest in doing additional challenging sports. They were also in the youngest age groups which means for the DMO there is a potential to create loyalty and increase intention to revisit with appropriate additional offers (e.g. accommodation or side events).

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K3 Catskiing: Diversifying a livelihood and community through tourism

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ABSTRACT

British Columbia, Canada possesses a rich natural resource economy and growing tourism sector economy. Forestry, mining and fishing served as pillars for the economy for more than a century and many rural communities flourished under single industry resource extraction while supply was plentiful and demand was voracious. This was most evident in forestry dependent communities where a life time career may be spent in such industry solely within one's home community and region. Circumstances have changed in the 21st century and trends supportive of a global economy accompanied by global competition has rendered many single industry rural economies unsustainable. Rural restructuring and rural economic diversification are but two responses to this changing dynamic and subsequent population migration to the urban.

The proposed paper presents a case where persons primarily involved in the forest sector in one rural community have made a transition to employment now primarily in the tourism sector within the past decade. The case describes and elaborates on the personal and professional experience and challenge that accompanied that transition. The tourism business now plays a growing role in sustaining the livelihoods of individuals, and contributes to redefining a rural community that was one time forestry-dependent and unsure about how to sustain its future. Data collection involved interviews with key informants who went through this transition. Results and discussion address the time, logistics, investment, and rewards that characterize the relatively new tourism business. Overall, the paper is instructive to those who may question the viability of transitioning to tourism, and to those contemplating the opportunity to sustain their own livelihoods, and contribute to sustaining their rural community.

Tourist experiences with zero inclusive

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the creation of tourist experiences in events, with zero inclusive. Tourism packages with all inclusive, can offer the best flights, hotels, beach location, restaurants and activities. How is the tourist experience created when all of these traditional tourism demands are not fulfilled, and zero is inclusive? And what are the experiences? Zero inclusive in these experience context are tourists that work voluntarily in an event, where the volunteers pay their own travel, food, overnight stay, and work for free. This paper uses a qualitative approach, and 25 interviews have been conducted in four events in Finnmark, Norway. Nothing in the experiences is facilitated, and the experience creation is in the work tasks together with volunteer colleagues. It's like a holiday experience, without a stream of commodified moments. It is a value creation that could be seen as authentic and real, created together with the event organizer and the other volunteers.

Keywords: experience, event, volunteers, authenticity

Rural tourism development in mountain regions: Challenges and success factors

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ABSTRACT

Rural mountain communities are facing ever more challenges in terms of regional development. They have difficulties to benefit from emerging economic, social and environmental dynamics and may fail to take advantage of their local resources and capabilities. Rural tourism acts as an important driver in the promotion of rural regional development as it offers opportunities for income generation and job creation. However, rural tourism development faces particular and challenging circumstances compared to urban destinations (such as the prevalence of micro businesses).

The present study aims at identifying key success factors and challenges for the development of attractive tourism products and offers within rural and mountain areas. Based on a selection of best practice case studies and qualitative interviews with representatives of rural tourism initiatives across the Alps, the Apennine and the Carpathians, the study analyzes driving and limiting conditions for the implementation of rural tourism development. The

interviews were evaluated with the qualitative analysis technique GABEK (Zelger, 1999; Pechlaner and Volgger, 2012). GABEK aids in structuring experiences, knowledge and perceptions of interviewees and represents them in semantic networks of keywords.

Findings indicate that the integration of agriculture and tourism greatly contributes to deliver authentic tourism experiences and to create long-term positive effects in terms of wellbeing in rural communities. Close-knit and inter-sectoral networks, a common orientation towards quality as well as an effective communication and branding strategy seem to be key success factors to overcome potential obstacles in rural tourism. As a result, the peculiarities of rural and mountain areas might become success factors in the competition for national and international tourists.

Evaluating relationship between farmer's identity and managerial efficiency of dairy farms that conduct educational tourism

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

The educational function is a part of multifunctionality in agriculture with positive externalities to society, and educational dairy farms in Japan are among the most organized frameworks that provide educational services in agriculture. Nevertheless, these educational services provided by educational dairy farms have yet to become an economically viable activity. For this reason, educational services have not been fully evaluated from a farm diversification perspective. To provide empirical evidence, the evaluation of management efficiency of farms performing educational activities is increasingly necessary to promote farm diversification under intensifying global competition in farm trade. Evaluation of efficiency, however, has not been conducted in the arena of educational tourism and rural tourism although such evaluations have been extensively conducted in tourism economics and agricultural economics. To evaluate appropriately the technical efficiency of these newly emerging services, the author introduces an additional perspective below. It is necessary to consider not only the technical reasons that cause production inefficiency but also farmers' policy for performing this newly emerging activity. This is because how farmers provide the educational services varies widely depending on the farmers' policy toward these new services whether they are a non-charging volunteer activity or a profit-making activity. If these factors are not considered, the technical efficiency of the educational dairy farms will be overestimated.

Thus, first this paper evaluates how the activity of educational services exerts influence on the efficiency of the main activity, milk production. Second, since the educational services are not yet economically viable, this paper con-

ducts a simulation that evaluates management efficiency when two outputs, milk production and educational services, are supposed to be maximized. Finally, based on these evaluations this paper presents policy recommendations toward the establishment of economically viable educational services.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

First, the researcher employs the stochastic frontier production function (SFPF) model to evaluate how the activity of educational service affects the technical efficiency of milk production, which is the main activity of educational dairy farms, unlike tourism ranches. Second, data envelop analysis (DEA) is used for a simulation of how technical efficiency will vary when these farms maximize the two outputs by whether or not farmers levy charges for educational services. From these results, factors to be considered in designing support measures toward viable educational services will be discussed. Data were collected by a questionnaire survey to the entire group of 257 farms designated as educational dairy farms by the Japan Dairy Council jointly conducted by the author and the Japan Dairy Council from October to December in 2009 by surface mail. The author conducted a supplementary survey by telephone in 2009 and 2010. Sample size used for this study was 123 family farms to maintain homogeneity of the sample because there are various ranches designated as educational dairy farms, such as publicly owned ranches, ranches run by educational institutions or cooperatives, etc., which are not necessarily oriented toward maximizing the profitability of milk production.

RESULTS

(1) The estimation result of the SFPF of milk production indicates that the technical efficiency of those farms that levied charges for educational services was inferior to non-levying farms although charging for the service is an indicator of farmers' orientation toward viable educational services. This is probably because their aim of management efficiency is not solely placed on the single maximization of milk production, but on the maximization of their management utilization of resources. Thus, we tested this hypothesis by DEA model estimation.

(2) The estimation results of two outputs, milk production and the educational services activities, using the DEA model revealed that those farms that implement charging for educational services realized relatively higher management efficiency. This result demonstrated that some of the farms attained high management efficiency in conducting both milk production and educational services.

(3) Nevertheless, the differences in the efficiency scores between those

farms charging and not charging were not large. Further, the average efficiency scores for both types of farms are not high enough to say they all attained high management efficiency in absolute terms. This result indicates that there is much room for improvement in farm-resource utilization to realize a viable educational tourism farm activity.

(4) In this respect, it is interesting to find that females in charge of the educational services and younger labour input in milk production are favourable toward technical efficiency in milk production from the result of the SFPF. Therefore, it will become important to expand the activity domain for females and young members of family farms not only in milk production, but also in the educational service activity.

DISCUSSION

In conclusion, it will be important to achieve qualitative improvement in terms of labour input that covers multiple sectors on the farm. Consequently, it should be scrutinized whether policy design of support measures for capability building in farm resource management takes into account multiple sectors including educational service activity. For this aim, first of all, educational services should be properly placed in the dairy farm policy arena.

Keywords: educational tourism in agriculture, identity, data envelopment analysis, technical efficiency, dairy farm

Cross-border rural tourism area: a case of Finland and Russian Karelia

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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the general background for cross-border tourist regions in Europe and gives a brief description of rural tourism sector in Tyrol, Austria and Italy. General features of rural tourism sector in Finland and Republic of Karelia, Russia are highlighted. The spatial allocation of accommodation facilities in the Republic of Karelia is revealed. Authors explore general context and pre-conditions favorable to the development of cooperation at the operational level between Finland and the Republic of Karelia in the sphere of rural tourism. Based on the results of the study authors try to estimate the feasibility of promoting cross-border rural tourism area that would cover Finland and the Republic of Karelia.

Keywords: rural tourism, cross-border cooperation, networking, Finland, Republic of Karelia, Russia

Type of the manuscript: Case study.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism as a service sector generates relatively high value added and invokes a multiplicative effect within product chains. Rural tourism serves as a source of income for rural settlements and thus contributes to the sustainability of rural areas. The role of rural tourism sector is even more important for the areas with limited opportunities for agricultural production as well as for those where traditional rural industries has declined or become considerably less labour intensive. Republic of Karelia is a Russian northern peripheral region

experiencing loss of population in rural areas due to noncompetitive agricultural sector and shift in forest harvesting technologies. The distinctive feature of the Republic of Karelia is its strong tourist image. Therefore there is a need and opportunities for developing rural tourism in the Republic of Karelia. Karelia's neighboring country – Finland – is known for its rich opportunities for rural vacationing. Rural tourism sector in Finland is well-established and internationally recognized. The aim of this study is to explore feasibility of cross-border rural tourism area that would cover regions in both countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-border tourist regions in Europe

Cross-border tourist regions in Europe are not formally established but are recognized to some extent within some Euroregions. Euroregions being transnational co-operation structures between two (or more) contiguous territories located in different European countries do not have direct legislative or governmental power, although they may have established associative bodies and/or common strategies aimed at promotion cross-border cooperation at regional level (Council of Europe, 2013). Tourism is among prioritized spheres of cooperation particularly in those Euroregions that share common tourism profile. Probably the most distinct Euroregion in that respect is Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino. The region is formed by the Austrian State of Tyrol and the Italian provinces of South Tyrol and Trentino. All parts of Tyrol share the same tourist profile i.e. mountain skiing and other winter activities combined with extensive opportunities for accommodation in rural areas with strong traditional heritage. We have found no evidence of formally institutionalized network of tourist enterprises that covers all parts of Tyrol in both countries, however the network of that kind is sustained by links between companies participating in cross-border product chains. "Physical" content of the network is comprised of ski resorts, accommodation facilities, restaurants, and other tourist service entities connected with the net of tourist routes (Donskih, 2012). Thus, the cross-border network is established de facto. Regional authorities on the both sides of the border provide political support to the promoting cross-border tourism cooperation (Tirol, 2013b). Nevertheless, in spite of politically declared cross-border integrity and established practical cooperation, Austrian and Italian parts of Tyrol are branded and promoted on the tourist market separately: two different web-sites are launched for them (South Tyrol, 2013; Tirol, 2013a).

Rural tourism sector in Finland

Rural tourism in Finland is being actively developed for more than 30 years.

The pioneers were farmers who have been forced to explore means of income alternative to agriculture. Nowadays, there are about 10 thousand guest houses and 250 farms offering accommodation located, as a rule, in the immediate proximity to a lake shore or a river (fin-digest.ru, 2013). Most of cottages are owned by individuals, not companies. Every cottage and farm is equipped with sauna. The comfort level of accommodation facilities varies from modest to luxury. About 80% of the marketed cottages qualify for at least three stars out of five according to classification developed by Lomarengas Oy company (Lomarengas, 2013).

The main natural driver for rural tourism in Finland is nature environment in rural areas – lakes, rivers, and forests. As stated by Pesonen et al. (2011) “a typical Finnish rural holiday includes accommodation in a cottage, local food, sauna and some kind of nature activities, most often swimming, rowing and walking in the forest. Rural tourism establishments are often located in remote countryside, far away from neighbors.” According to the research of motivations in rural tourism by Pesonen et al. (2011) tourists visiting rural destinations in Finland are motivated primarily with the opportunity to relax away from the ordinary and to have a sense of comfort. They also value the opportunity to be together as a family and to get refreshed.

Rural tourism in Finland is being internationalized. Foreign tourists account for 14 percent share of rural tourism customers (Komppula and Saraniemi, 2007). Largest cottage rental company in Finland – Lomarengas Oy – has recently established marketing division for Russia and launched Russian interface for its web-site along with native Finnish and ‘global’ English ones (Lomarengas, 2013); these facts contribute to the evidence of internationalization of Finnish rural tourism sector.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was pursued in several lines. The first study task included review of general background for cross-border tourist regions in Europe and a distinct example of the region with specialization on rural tourism. The review has been done by analyzing literature and information at original web-sites. The example of cross-border rural tourist region – Tyrol – has been chosen based on the frequency of mentioning in the internet. The purpose within this task was to reveal the extent of institutionalization and integrity of the region examined.

The second task was to highlight general features of rural tourism sector in Finland. Research papers by Finnish authors and statistical data were reviewed in order to fulfill this task. The issues concerned were typical characteristics of rural tourist accommodation, tourists’ motivation and degree of internationalization of the rural tourism sector.

The third task included study of rural tourism sector in the Republic of

Karelia, Russia. The issues concerned were typical characteristics of rural tourist accommodation and the spatial allocation of accommodation facilities. The research method employed for this task was gathering, systematization and analysis of information on marketed rural tourist accommodation facilities. Accommodation units were grouped by municipal districts and group totals were plotted on the map. The information was obtained mainly from the internet, the sources were home sites for individual cottages and hotels, and aggregator sites specializing on rural tourist accommodation (Tourist Information Center of the Republic of Karelia, 2013; All Karelia, 2013; Guest houses and cottages in Karelia, 2013). The data were also obtained within authors' field studies within related projects.

The fourth task was to explore general context and pre-conditions favorable to the development of cooperation at the operational level between Finland and the Republic of Karelia in the sphere of rural tourism.

Based on the results of the study authors try to estimate the feasibility of promoting cross-border rural tourism area that would cover Finland and the Republic of Karelia.

RESULTS

Rural tourism sector in the Republic of Karelia, Russia is undergoing a stage of early development. As of 2014, no distinct model is adopted as a general pattern for promotion of rural tourism sector. Some elements for the model are borrowed from the Finnish rural tourism sector and others from the Russian hospitality industry in general.

Republic of Karelia is famous as country of lakes – there are more than 60'000 lakes in the region. The territory of the Republic of Karelia is covered with forests by 55% (Tourist ..., 2013). According to the acting legislation all rivers and lakes are protected with 'water protection zones' within which any agricultural and forest harvesting activities are forbidden. Rural tourist accommodation facilities in the Republic of Karelia are typically located in the immediate or close proximity to a lake and are surrounded with forest.

Various types of accommodation are available for rural tourists: a separate cottage (often built purposefully for hospitality business), a house shared with hosting family, a cottage within a small tourist village, and room in a hotel. Separate cottages are mostly owned by individuals, tourist villages and hotels are operated by companies. Accommodation facilities are often located on the territory of the rural settlement or close to it, that is caused by the lack of roads to remote areas outside main pathways. As a rule there is always an opportunity for purchasing local agricultural and forest food products. Every accommodation facility is equipped with sauna (All Karelia, 2013).

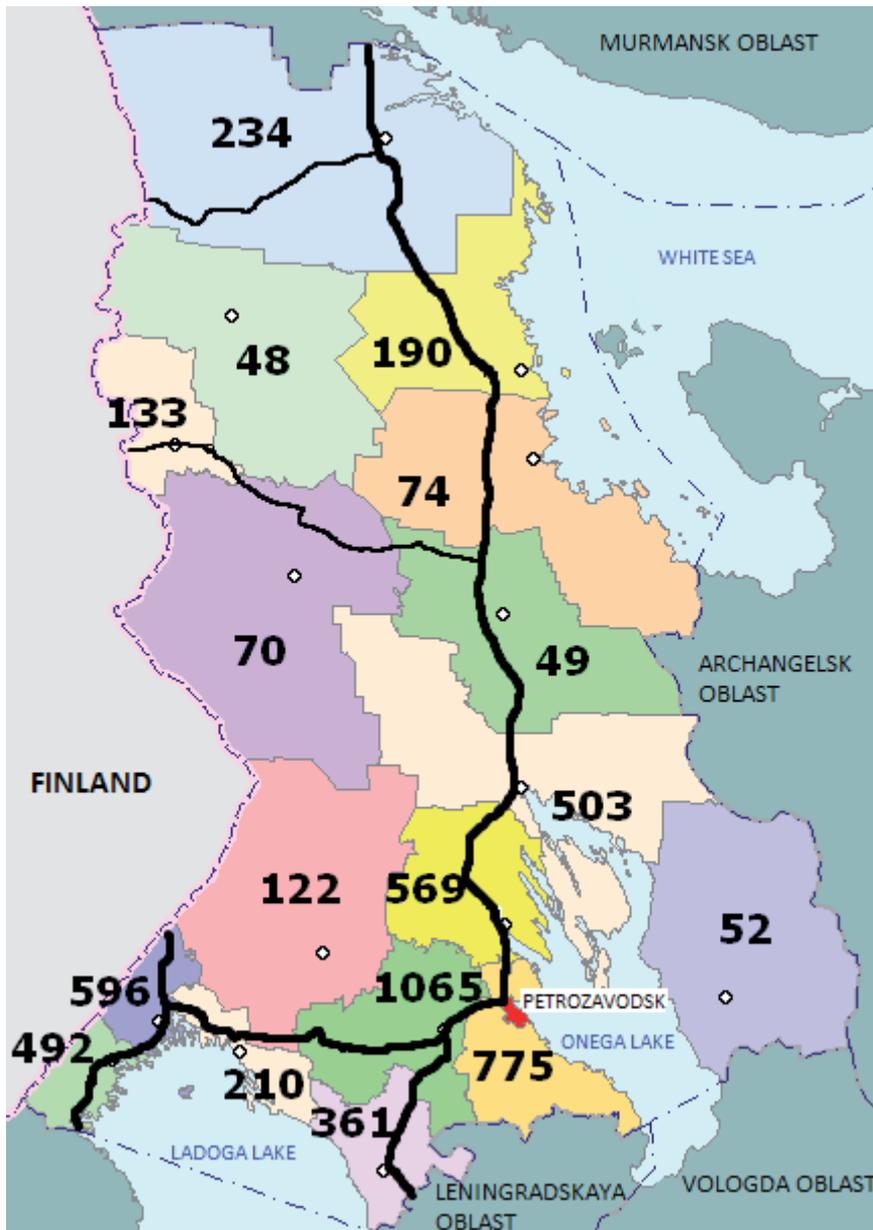


Figure 1. Capacity of rural accommodation facilities by districts in the Republic of Karelia.

Total capacity of rural tourist accommodation in the Republic of Karelia accounts to 5.5 thousand beds (Shishkin, Petrova, 2013). Accommodation facilities are allocated spatially unevenly (Figure 1). The highest concentration is revealed in the following areas:

1. districts surrounding Petrozavodsk, capital city of the Republic of Karelia

- whose community accounts to about half of the total population of the region;
2. districts having direct road connection to Finland; and
 3. districts close to St. Petersburg, the biggest city in the Northwestern Russia.

The specific feature of the geographical position of the Republic of Karelia is conjunction of peripherality and borderness (Kolesnikov, 2012). The peripherality is determined firstly by the region's remote position to Moscow and other big cities in the central parts of Russia, and secondly low density of population in the region. The borderness of the Republic of Karelia is among the highest in Russia as it is directly attached to EU border and has relatively good transport connections with neighboring Finland.

Peripherality is generally viewed as a negative factor for a region's progress. To our opinion, influence of peripherality on rural tourism is rather peculiar – remoteness of the territory from large industrial centers and low density of population set specific conditions required by a rural tourist: seclusion, untouched nature environment, calmness without city buzz and rush. Borderness provides a pre-condition for cross-border cooperation in general and in the sphere of rural tourism in particular. Strategic priorities of the Republic of Karelia aimed at launch of new crossing points on the Russian-Finnish border, development of East-West transport corridors, and creation of multimodal transport nodes (Saveliev, Shishkin, 2003) would contribute to the growth of inbound tourist flows to the region and particularly facilitate international rural tourism.

Republic of Karelia participates in the cross-border cooperation with Finland at all levels of contacts – personal, business, and political. The intensity of cross-border exchange at personal level could be illustrated by the number of border crossings via points located in the Republic of Karelia: it raised from 1'408.5 thousand in 2009 to 2'062.0 thousand in 2012 (The Finnish Border Guard, 2013) that is three times greater than population of the Republic of Karelia. Republic of Karelia is one of leading regions in Russia in terms of intensity of foreign trade with Finland and volume and diversity of investments from Finland (Druzhinin, Kukhareva, 2012; Kolesnikov, 2012) that is an evidence of well-established cross-border business cooperation (Shlyamin, 2011). At the political level, Republic of Karelia is involved in cooperation with Finland regions within EU programmes and bilateral agreements. Regions of Kainuu, North Karelia and Northern Ostrobothnia in Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia has formed Euregio Karelia in 2000 (Euregio Karelia, 2013). Practical projects are implemented within the Karelia ENPI CBC Programme (The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, cross-border cooperation), and Tourism cooperation is one of the themes of the programme (Karelia ENPI CBC, 2013). Finland and Republic of Karelia are linked with tourist routes developed within joint projects: The Blue Road (Norway – Sweden – Finland – Republic of Karelia – Archangel), Mining Road

(Outokumpu – Petrozavodsk), White Road (Kainuu, Oulu region – Republic of Karelia) and others (Karelia ENPI CBC, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

Finland and Republic of Karelia share similar conditions and factors for rural tourism development. They are:

- similar natural conditions – great number of small lakes, similar landscapes, forests, climate;
- similar spatial characteristics – low density of population, extensive scarcely inhabited areas disposing to secluded vacationing;
- shared history and cultural traditions;
- active cross-border cooperation in various spheres including tourism facilitating cross-border exchange with information and knowledge and encouraging mutual penetration of entrepreneurial initiatives.

The similarity of factor and conditions is favorable to establishing cross-border rural tourism area. The operational engine of the area could be a network of rural tourism actors in both countries. The core of the network is to be constituted by operators of accommodation facilities in rural areas. The network should also include tourist agencies, transport companies, entertainment agencies and other organizations involved in tourist product chains. The business goal of the network is to promote rural tourist products available within the joint area on domestic and international markets. The value of the network is that the synergy effect and economy on scale would then be achieved. The practical effect of the network for its members besides better marketing would be exchange with knowledge and best practices.

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Customer insight as a driving force for development of sustainability elements in rural tourism

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development has become as a cross-cutting theme in all industry sectors, including tourism. The bigger tourism companies have been active in improving sustainability of their operations as well as using these achievements in their marketing. In small rural companies, however, the sustainability has not often been integrated as a conscious strategic part of the business operations. There are several studies indicating that sustainability is becoming more and more important to the customers of tourism businesses. Nevertheless, especially in the field of rural tourism the sustainability innovations are still promoted to the enterprises by using the savings in energy and money as marketing arguments. The fact, that sustainability could provide a competitive advantage to the companies, has not been considered properly in small and micro companies until the past few years. In order to enhance the innovation in sustainable rural tourism products in grass root level and fully utilize the rural companies' potential concerning sustainable tourism, it is vital to know, how the existing rural tourism customer groups consider and value sustainability.

This paper illustrates, what kind of opinions the current customers of rural tourism enterprises have related to the sustainable value-based services and products. The study consists of a survey data collected during the summer

2011 (n=685) from four different regions in Finland. Factor analysis was conducted to gain understanding of multiple customer bases.

The results indicate that there are four different customer groups valuing sustainability differently. The analysis reveals that the customer group valuing sustainability is by no means homogeneous. The customers valuing cultural sustainability are not necessarily willing to pay e.g. on the ecological sustainability and vice versa.

In further studies it is suggested to segment the customer groups valuing sustainability. This might provide with opportunities to rural tourism companies. However, it can be stated that even results of this paper help rural tourism micro entrepreneurs in improving their marketing activities.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, rural tourism, factor analysis

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism is defined in various ways (see e.g. Borg, Kivi & Partti, 2002; Butler, 1991; Swarbrooke, 1998). According to Tuulentie (2009), sustainable tourism can be understood either as a goal and the ideal stage of business in which the quality of an environment is secured, locality acknowledged, and stakeholders considered as an important part of business. Sustainable tourism pays special attention to natural resources as well as cultural heritage (see e.g. Björk, 2007). In this study, sustainable tourism is considered as tourism, that is accessible for all, economically profitable, and does not destroy environment or local cultures (Swarbrooke, 1998, 13). This study focuses on customers' perspective on using sustainability-related services.

There are several studies indicating that sustainability is becoming more and more important to the customers of tourism businesses. According to Yeoman (2008) the trend reveals that ethical consuming will probably rise up the demand for small and personal service providers instead of corporations. All this provide potential to small rural tourism companies to specialize in the sustainability. It has also been found out that rural tourism holds often the image of sustainable tourism in the eyes of the public and customers. This is due to facts that rural tourism is typically based on local traditions and is located in clean natural environments (Blinnikka, 2012). Also the values, which relate to sustainability like clean, nature, local culture, traditions and collectivity are typical central elements in the image of rural tourism in Finland (Matilainen & Aro, 2002). In a way it can be said that the rural tourism already have a certain "good start" for the sustainability imago in the eyes of the customers, regardless of the reality in the companies. This provides an excellent ground to build on, but it can also be easily lost, if the rural tourism companies do not take sustainability issues seriously.

There are also indications that the small Finnish rural tourism entrepre-

neers enhance sustainability elements in their business, however, this happens typically unconsciously. They do not often realize acting in sustainable way, rather just in the way that suits to their business operations and ethics (Blinnikka, 2012). Maybe because of this, the sustainability innovations are still promoted to the small enterprises by using the savings in energy and money as marketing arguments. The fact, that sustainability could provide a competitive advantage to the companies, has not been considered properly in small and micro companies until the past few years. In order to be able to use sustainability elements as a competitive advantage, it is crucial to know, the customer insights. It is important to find the right customer groups for the sustainable-related services.

Pesonen (2012) found four basic segments based on his customer survey (n= 1043). The groups were named as "Wellbeing-tourists" (22.6 %), "Family-tourists" (27.8 %), "Hometown-tourists" (20.4%), and "Social-tourists" (29.3 %). In terms of expectations, only Family-tourists mentioned ecological responsibility as an expectation from the service enterprise. Komppula and Pesonen (2009) described the typical rural tourist in Finland is a woman aged 45-54, who is looking for relaxing and freshment in her holiday. Beautiful landscape, peace as well as silence, and safety in the holiday resort is special important. However, neither of these studies focused especially on sustainability.

There is growing number of studies from marketing perspective focusing on sustainability. In the Finnish tourism investigation ethical tourists were categorized in eight (8) groups. One of them is called 'organic-urbans' which refers to people interested to travel city centers, however, in ecological way. The other group is titled as "fair trade tourists" whose behavior is based on decisions supporting fair trade (see Hienonen, 2010; Kauppinen, 2010). These categories relate to sustainable tourism, but without precise rural tourism context. This paper aims more narrow perspective of tourists in rural areas. Previously it is indicated that the customers may make the decision based on ecological values instead of only prize of the services. O'Neill and Alonso stated in 2009 that there seems to be a clear increasing customer demand for greener products and services. Also Dodds et al. (2010) found that even mass-tourism oriented travelers show willingness to pay for sustainability practices at the destination. Also so called LOHAS (lifestyles of health and sustainability) - consumers have been a lot under the public discussion. They are seen a potential customer group for local and slow tourism (Puhakka, 2011). This group represents the consumers with ecological choices and supporting fair trade products and health food. LOHAS combines customer's values of ethical, ecological and health as well as wellbeing. According to Finnish commercial research by Tripod Research (2010), 24 % of LOHAS consumers prefer sustainability in travelling choices compared to 5 % amount of general consumers. In the research, 10 % of consumers were labelled as 'LOHAS heavy' in the sample of 2158 Finnish consumers. Of these majority belonged to the age group of 55-65 (30 %) years, and women were more represented in this group

(63 %). The trend towards LOHAS consuming is increasing in Finland: year 2009 48 % of respondents were categorized as LOHAS consumers and year 2010 52 % (Tripod research, 2010).

Despite of this growing evidence of increasing importance of sustainability attributes in tourists' selection criteria, it can be, however, argued that the relative importance of sustainability is minor compared to other aspects of travel decisions, such as cost, destination, and quality (see e.g. Merilahti 2012, Matilainen et al. 2011.). Based on this the research (e.g. Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Budeanu, 2007) generally suggests that the perceived sustainability in a company's service offer can add to the total perceived value of the products, but the customers would not be willing to pay extra only for sustainable attributes. Similar reasoning can be found in general population studies of attitudes towards environment, which suggests that positive attitudes towards sustainable development do not necessarily convert into sustainable behaviors and willingness to pay for sustainability improvements (e.g. Blake et al., 1997; Steg & Vlek, 2009). This indicates that even though it may be difficult for the rural tourism company to gain extra price from sustainable products, the sustainability may, nevertheless, provide competitive advantage to the company, when the customer is selecting the products (Matilainen et al., 2011). The small rural tourism companies do not very often plan their activities with the long-term strategic approach. Instead they often react to the changes as they occur (see e.g. Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2012). Therefore, when developing sustainable tourism, the general estimations on the possible increase of sustainability minded tourists are not concrete enough for the entrepreneurs' to realistically consider the sustainability of a competitive advantage. According to the previous studies, the Finnish rural tourism companies have indicated interest towards improving sustainability aspects and make them more visible in their companies (Blinnikka, 2012). Nevertheless, they need to be able to gradually change their activities towards "sustainability markets", so that the economic sustainability of the business activities can also be safeguarded during the transition phase. The change of the current customer base to the potential new one must be flexible. In addition the rural tourism companies already may have the sustainability minded customers as part of their customer group. If the sustainability would be brought more visible in the companies' marketing and products, it might increase the visits and enhance the customer satisfaction. Therefore, the knowledge on the opinions of their current customers is vital in order to direct the development activities.

Sustainability as such has not found to be very successful marketing argument. Blinnikka (2012) states that rural tourism has an image of sustainable tourism due its traditions in hand and nature around. The values such as clean, nature, local culture, traditions and collectivity are typical as an image of rural tourism in Finland (Matilainen & Aro, 2002). Nuijanmaa and Matilainen (2012) indicate that Finnish rural tourism entrepreneurs utilize social sustainability, especially culture, in their business. They suggest origi-

nality issue to be discussed. Furthermore, entrepreneurs do not consciously consider originality as sustainable matter.

It has been also found out that the sustainability minded customers are not by any means a homogeneous group. The customers that value the social sustainability may not value the economic sustainability and vice versa. It is important to create segments of the customers also within the customers valuing sustainability. For this, more information of the customer's opinions is needed, and this is the focus in this study.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate, what kind of opinions the current customers of rural tourism enterprises have related to the sustainable value-based services and products. The customer groups valuing sustainability might provide further opportunities to rural tourism companies. It also helps rural tourism micro entrepreneurs in improving their marketing activities.

METHOD AND DATA

The data is based on KESMA I project which lasted one year in 2011. The aim of the project and its studies was to deepen the understanding of the consumer behavior of the customers within the rural tourism. In addition the present state of the social and ecological sustainability in the small rural tourism enterprises was being investigated. Ecological sustainability, social sustainability with cultural and accessibility were in focus (Blinnikka, 2012) as the theoretical frame used in the project and study.

Concerning the customers' opinions regarding sustainability, a survey data was collected during the summer 2011 from four different regions in Finland. Survey is generally used data collection method in tourism, and it works the best especially in customer surveys (Long, 2007). It was considered appropriate method here since the aim was to focus on the current customers. However, there is no statistics about the population to be studied. Therefore one cannot decide a sample size as such. A structured questionnaire was used in all four regions. The questions were formulated by using the knowledge on sustainable consumer behavior, attitudes and life styles, e.g. on LOHAS consumers (e.g. Puhakka, 2011, O'Neill & Alonso, 2009; Fraj & Martinez, 2006). The previous research was used to help to formulate the statements and questions used so that they properly measured the sustainability values of the customers. In addition to the previous literature an expert group was used to jointly develop the questions. It also influenced on validity of the measurements. Likert scale from 1-5 was chosen for the structured questions, which were presented as a form of statements. In addition an option for not having an opinion was present. However, it was not considered as a neutral answer but, was advised to use only if the respondent did not have any experience or knowledge of the detail. Accordingly this was taken into consideration in analyzing phase. The questionnaire was tested by two different groups before

the survey was started.

Some of the data was collected in the rural tourism companies, some in touristic events as a site survey. Even though site survey have found to have its limitations especially when estimating the potential future customer groups or when analyzing the respondent date for the survey, it was considered proper method here, since the survey focused on the current customer base of rural tourism and site survey provided feasible method for collecting data. The respondents were selected randomly. Altogether 685 consumers answered the survey. Of the respondents 60% were women. All the age groups from 18 to 65 were covered by 17- 20 % of the respondents, except the respondents over 65 years, who were a smaller group (8%).

A part of results were analyzed and reported by Kaisa Merilahti in 2012. In her thesis (Merilahti, 2012), she made profiles of the Finnish rural tourism customers based on this data. Consumers' attitudes towards sustainability were present in descriptive sense. In her analysis, she did not make factory analysis as such. Therefore we reanalyzed the raw data aiming to find out, if any interesting clear groupings can be identified that could be used in further analyzing for sustainable rural tourism. In the customer survey there was a group of statements that measured the opinions about sustainability. Some demographics were asked at the end of the questionnaire: age, gender, education, and household earnings.

Using the Principal Component Analysis with the Varimax rotation we found four factors that describe the respondents' attitudes towards sustainability. The PCA analysis was found valid. KMO measure = 0.828 and Bartlett's test's $p < 0,001$. It is said the sample is adequate for a given variables when the diagonal elements, like the KMO measure, is greater than 0.5 at a bare minimum (Field, 2013). Factors' were closed and accepted using loadings greater than .4 as recommended in the literature.

RESULTS

The profile of the respondents in general in this study is mainly described in Merilahti's (2012) report. The data consists of 72% of respondents who appreciated good relationship and enjoyment of the life. It was also one reason for approaching rural tourism. Other main reasons were cottage vacation or the event in concern, such as concert, wedding, etc. Customers made priority in criteria of the target destination. Beautiful landscape, prize, quality of service and safety were mentioned first out of seven (Merilahti, 2012).

In Table 1 it is shown four main factors that emerged when making factor analysis. We named the factors as "Rural Tradition" (component 1), "Fair and Organic (component 2), LOHAS (component 3) and "Responsibility" (component 4). Table is created through a rotated component matrix. The unused statements are omitted.

| Rotated Component Matrix | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| I consider myself as an environmentally aware consumer | | | .681 | |
| I If there is a fair trade product and an ordinary product available, I always choose a fair trade product | | .779 | | |
| I usually choose an organic alternative although it might be more expensive than the ordinary product | | .852 | | |
| I feel that I cannot really make a difference with my buying decisions | | - | | |
| I buy often natural products | | .729 | | |
| I am active in recycling | | | .752 | |
| I am worried about the chasm between the rich and the poor | | | .473 | |
| I am involved in organizational activities during my free time | | | | .536 |
| Outdoor activities in the nature belong to my dearest hobbies | .528 | | | |
| In my opinion I live a healthy life | .495 | | | |
| I value traditions | .706 | | | |
| Countryside gives me a possibility to calm down and relax | .742 | | | |
| Countryside should stay alive/vital | .636 | | | |
| I assume that people are more hospitable in rural areas than in the cities | .428 | | | |
| I use public transport during my vacation whenever it is possible | | | | .737 |
| I have often needed more information about environmental concerns in the travel destination | | | | .646 |
| When there are two equal tourism products available I choose the more environmentally friendly one | | | | .426 |
| I support services and products offered by small entrepreneurs | .532 | | | |

Table 1: Factors of sustainability attitudes of the respondents

Rural tradition -tourists want to support small entrepreneurs when they buy services. Countryside and nature are valued the most. Healthy life and hospitality are valued in some extent, but they seemed not to be the most important

values.

Fair and organic - tourists claim that their decision to buy is based on organic option always. This is even if the purchase costs more than other option.

LOHAS –tourists think others. Equality and environment are the reasons being active in daily life. The relation to travelling is not seen here.

Responsible –tourist is concerned mostly by environment or ecological issues. This relates to travelling options or choosing a vacation destination. The corresponding sum variables (means) were formed. The higher the values of the named sum variables are the more the respondents appreciate rural traditions (cultural sustainability) and green values (ecological sustainability).

There are some differences between factors regarding to their social demographics, such as age and gender. There were significant differences between the respondent groups. As usually women are “greener” than men by all the four scales. This is shown in Table 2:

| Sum variable | Gender | Mean | p-value |
|------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Rural tradition | Man | 3.99 | 0.00 |
| | Woman | 4.16 | |
| Fair and organic | Man | 2.78 | 0.00 |
| | Woman | 3.03 | |
| LOHAS | Man | 3.45 | 0.00 |
| | Woman | 3.74 | |
| Responsibility | Man | 2.56 | 0.03 |
| | Woman | 2.71 | |

Table 2: Customer groups differs between genders

The factors loaded based on means, i.e. showing customers’ sustainability orientation. A year of birth correlates negatively and an age positively with the factors ($p < 0,001$). Traditions are appreciated more by older people and women. *LOHAS*-customers are covered the most by older people. This result is in line with Finnish report about ‘*LOHAS-heavy*’ consumers in which the most typical age group was 55-65 years old people (see Tripod Research 2010). Only some very small statistical differences were found in variables. These differences seemed irrelevant.

CONCLUSIONS

Research question in this paper was “what kind of opinions the current customers of rural tourism enterprises have related to the sustainable value-based services and products?” The results indicate that there can be found four customer groups valuing sustainability differently. For example, *Fair and organic* –tourists buy organic options whenever available and without thinking the price. Similarly *LOHAS* –tourists seemed being committed to their ideology. But in what extent, that did not come clear in this study. Therefore, these topics would be fruitful to study further.

All the factors reflected customer insight related to sustainability in some extent. How should it be considered in marketing services? Based on the results of this study, it is not possible to state.

It would be interesting to study further what are the precise sustainability issues expected by the consumers in accommodation services in country side. Fair trade products and ecological options are already in retail business. How far is rural tourism in this matter?

The analysis reveals that the customer group valuing sustainability is by no means homogeneous. Four factors seemed having values overlapping each other. One can argue for different types of sustainable consumer groups, but here it is more like types of sustainability within consumers. The customers valuing cultural sustainability, for example *Rural tradition* –tourists, are not necessarily willing to pay e.g. on the ecological sustainability and vice versa. Furthermore, *Fair and organic* –tourists considers costs less important feature, and *Responsible* –tourist uses ecofriendly logistics. If the latter group makes this without cost consideration, it did not come out in the results. The priorities of sustainability types seemed the issue for differentiating the groups in this study.

In the future, segmenting the customer groups valuing sustainability might provide further opportunities to rural tourism companies. It would also help rural tourism micro entrepreneurs in improving their marketing activities. In the field of rural tourism the sustainability innovations are still promoted to the enterprises by using the savings in energy and money as marketing arguments. However, as Nuijanmaa and Matilainen (2012) noted that the meaning of sustainability may be valued differently by customers and entrepreneurs. Therefore more focus should be paid on developing sustainable marketing in this matter.

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Regional food production and its effect on rural tourism development – the case of Bavarian Jura

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ABSTRACT

Originally started for environmental reasons, the Bavarian cooperation project “Juradistl” nowadays acts as distribution network of agricultural products on a regional market. The local tourism industry has become one of the main users of this platform.

The study examines the platform’s influence on tourism development in the rural area of Bavarian Jura region, asks on how successful cooperation in this field can be organized and which stakeholders have to be involved. For that purpose, expert interviews are conducted with the regional hotel industry and gastronomy together with responsible persons of the network. The interviews were analyzed by the qualitative network analysis tool GABEK®, which is used to gain new insights of relations and processes.

Meanwhile, the name of the platform “Juradistl” has achieved certain recognition in the region and helps the regional tourism industry to position itself with high-quality products manufactured in a sustainable way. The network helps the tourism industry to gain access to regional products on a defined level of quality and quantity. Further, the platform enables small-scale rural producers to merchandize their products via an established brand. In this case, tourism is a main growth driver for regional food production. Different products are merchandized under one name, the cooperation acts as umbrella brand. Thus, the local food culture is more visible for tourists and tourism industry can create offers based on this. Culinary events supported by Juradistl already attract guests from surrounding urban areas.

Various public and private stakeholders work on this across rural district borders. Questions of Destination Governance can be discussed in this way.

A goal can be to put local food as a driving force to destination development. Although the ideal extent and diversity of the network is yet to be defined, key factors for successful cooperation will be a certain level of product quality, credibility and consistency.

Keywords: rural tourism; regional development, cooperation, tourism

Type of manuscript: Case study

INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism in rural areas is an important political aim for many European countries. According to several statistics, rural areas cover at least 68% of the total area in Germany (BBSR, 2013; OECD, 2007). This importance is reflected in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has been one of the central fields of action within the European Union (EU) since decades. Controversial discussions among different governmental and non-governmental organizations have arisen on the main objectives within this policy, mainly because CAP expenditure has increased constantly since the 1980s and remains at a high level of about 50 billion EUR, which occupies about 45% of the total EU expenditure (European Commission, 2013a). This importance demands ongoing justification towards the EU member states and puts the pressure on the responsible institutions to develop a modern and forward-looking CAP. For this purpose, the EU strives for better balance of the budget, improvement of environmental requirements, secure food production and balanced territorial development (European Commission, 2013b).

These targets show significant similarities to objectives in tourism development in rural areas. Tourism has diverse opportunities to bring economic growth into structurally weak regions or to reach a greater economic balance within the region (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997; Ribeiro & Marques, 2002). Therefore, the definition of rural tourism depends on the initial economic and ecologic capital of a region and on the stakeholders to be involved. Rural areas act as a setting for touristic products without compulsively integrating regional agriculture and food producers. Nevertheless, there are important forms of rural tourism which take into account the role of the farmer as a host and as a touristic actor who offers holidays on his farm or provides goods to visitors (Zeiner & Harrer, 2012).

This case study ranges within the shown spectrum of tourism and rural area surroundings and puts the focus on the regional food products and their effects on the development of rural tourism. The central aim of this paper is to explore the links between a regional marketing cooperation Juradistl, rural tourism in the Bavarian Jura region and their mutual effects.

Before discussing the case study in detail, there will be a short literature over-

view in order to show some results of the accomplished research.

Some theoretical observations on regional food and tourism

Interrelating regional food production and tourism development seems to be a promising approach to create additional economic value within a region due to the following observations:

- The demand for regional products and the importance of regional value chains among inhabitants and guests are growing (Alvensleben, 2000; Dimara & Scuras, 2005).
- High quality food sets a counterpoint to everyday eating behavior and is highly interesting for some target groups (BVK, 2011).
- Regional brands and products contribute to the differentiation of a region and have the potential to produce quality of life and identification with regional culture (Pechlaner et al., 2010).
- Food can be a highlight within a touristic package (Quan & Wang, 2004).

It is widely recognized that there is a counter trend to the globalization of the food industries (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 1999). The distribution and the marketing of food on a regional level can be a strategy for farmers to decouple from changing prices on the global market and to maintain profitability. This strategy is based on the concept of regional value chains and intends that the predominant part of a production process, be it goods or services, remains within the boundaries of a defined region (Schubert, 2009).

Nevertheless, the role of the 'region' in current and future food production has to be discussed. Kneafsey (2010) introduces the term of regional food systems and emphasizes the vague definition of regions in this context. They range from local food cooperation which function within defined places like towns, villages or neighborhoods to the use of the term 'regional' for the entirety of Europe (Lang et al., 2009). The motivating factors for the establishment of regional food systems are equally diverse. For this reason, it is useful to define a food region by certain variables like social and economic justice, food quality, freshness or ecological sustainability (Born & Purcell, 2006).

In nutrition, for many people the crucial argument for buying still tends to be the price. However, a growing number of people are willing to pay more for higher quality or organic food (BVK, 2011). If a regional food production focuses on these target groups, it has the potential to sell its goods at a lucrative price.

To add tourism to this discussion, the issue of region and food should be looked at from the point of view of the demand side. Tourists define the action space of a destination individually and are not willing to regard administrative borders (Bieger & Beritelli, 2013). Therefore, the touristic understanding of a region in food is to be defined by certain food products which reflect the traditional food culture and the culture of producing food. Linking regional

landscape and regional food can be a good way to use nutrition as a driving force in tourism development, especially if the host is able to provoke positive emotions for the guest (Stockebrand et al., 2011).

There are upcoming challenges for the management of a destination in this context because it has to be organized by the demands of the market and not by the demand of political entities (Pechlaner et al., 2012a). In some cases, food can be an identity-establishing topic that helps to overcome administrative borders in tourism management. Food might also have the potential to set a positive touristic experience for the guest during his stay at the destination. Regional products aid regions in remaining visible in times of an interchangeable mainstream by focusing on the uniqueness of regional resources (Steinecke, 2013).

One can say that regional food and rural areas only work in symbiosis. This could be true not only for production, but increasingly also for the demand side. Mobility is an important factor whether rural areas can profit from a greater share of relevant touristic target groups. Guests from urban areas have an increasing interest to overcome greater distances for an authentic food experience. In order to explain mobility readiness, the space based view (Keller, 2005) is taken into consideration as a theoretical concept. In this context, mobility does not only mean the overcoming of distances. In order to achieve a successful tourist valorization of rural areas and to promote destination development, a tourist product has to be charged with high quality activities and experiences. The study will analyze whether regional food can be a suitable topic for this.

To summarize, food in tourism offers two main opportunities for regional development. Firstly, regional food products might help a tourist destination to strengthen its marketing position and to increase its competitiveness. Secondly, rural food producers and farmers might benefit due to tourism development in the region by having a greater market for high quality products produced in a sustainable way. This interrelation has for example been shown in South Tyrol, where cooperation between tourism and agriculture is a main strategy for regional development (Südtirol News GmbH, 2013). It also acts as underlying idea for the case study of the Bavarian Jura region.

Research area

This study examines the Bavarian marketing cooperation Juradistl in terms of its influence on tourism development in the rural area of the Bavarian Jura region and its potential for regional development. A qualitative research approach has been chosen in order to gain insights in key success factors for product development and the organization of relations and processes.

Bavarian Jura Region:

The Bavarian Jura region is a rural area which is marketed as a whole for touris-

tic reasons. It is composed of the administrative districts Kehlheim, Neumarkt i.d.Oberpfalz, Amberg-Sulzbach and the western part of Regensburg. Its characteristic Jura landscape is very undulating and dominated by small rivers and quiet valleys. The vegetation is diverse and contains some endangered species like the silver thistle. Economically, the region is quite diverse. There are successful towns like Neumarkt i.d.Oberpfalz which function as small islands in a predominantly rural area with an ongoing high importance of agriculture. The touristic performance of the region lags behind neighboring regions like the Bavarian Forest and there is a domination of day-trip tourism (IHK, 2010).

Juradistl:

The idea of the cooperation project Juradistl – the name is derived from the silver thistle which is typical for the regional landscape – began more than ten years ago. The starting point was the idea to preserve the unique cultural landscape and the biodiversity of dry grassland and wetland and its interplay by supporting small-sized farms and shepherds in their capabilities to merchandize their products profitably. The promoters of Juradistl are composed of a wide range of different stakeholders including local and regional governments, associations, gastronomies, butcheries, farmers, educational providers and others. The outreach of this cooperation largely is congruent with the Bavarian Jura Region (Juradistl 2013).

Current products that are merchandized through Juradistl are

- Juradistl-Lamm (lamb)
- Juradistl-Weiderind (beef) and
- Juradistl-Streuobst (apple juice).

All these products are manufactured by regional farmers and processed by regional companies such as butcheries and beverage producers.

RESEARCH METHOD

As explained before, a qualitative research approach has been chosen. Six expert interviews were conducted with insiders and outsiders of the cooperation project on both the public and private sides. The interview questions were asked as open as possible in order to get genuine information. The first step of the analysis is accomplished by the transcription of the interviews. After this, the transcripts are divided into units of meaning, with three to nine lexical elements (Zelger, Oberprantacher, 2002). The statements are analyzed by use of the qualitative method GABEK® (Ganzheitliche Bewältigung von Komplexität – ©). This is a method for systematically analyzing textual qualitative data to obtain an overall picture of the expressed opinions. The underlying theory of GABEK® is “Wahrnehmungsgestalten” (perceptive ap-

pearances) by Stumpf (1939) and has been transferred to a theory of “linguistic gestalten” by Zelger (1999). This method is used in order to achieve new understandings of specific situations and processes. This requires the structuring of experiences, knowledge and expressed opinions of the interviewees (Zelger, 2000). The analysis of the data is carried out through the development of a rule-based network (Zelger, 1999) supported by the computer software WinRelan (Windows Relationen Analysis). Within the software, the meaningful lexical elements pass a basic coding process and as a result, the researcher obtains expressions that can be linked to other coded expressions. As a visual result, WinRelan provides nodes (expressions) and connecting lines, which symbolize the verbal relations between different expressions. If, for example, the terms ‘region’ and ‘tourism’ are connected by a line, the two expressions have been mentioned in one unit of meaning. The software makes it possible to read the precise relation behind this line in order to interpret the connection the right way. Using GABEK® as qualitative method makes it possible to organize knowledge transparently based on the natural language processing of individual statements. Valid and meaningful output can be achieved by the researcher in different research areas such as individuals, organizations, local and regional networks. In this case, semantic network analysis has been used to visualize central statements and interrelations.

RESULTS

Initially, we take a look at some terms that are central for the research question and that have already been illuminated in the literature review and the general observations.

- Region: What should a region look like in this context?
- Regional products: How do regional products have to be characterized to be successful?
- Tourism: What is necessary for tourism development in the process?

The aim of Figure 1 is to show the general characteristics and interrelations of these topics.

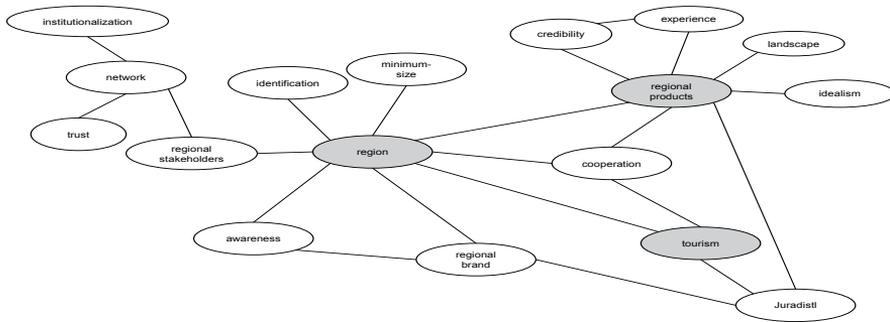


Figure 1: Semantic network analysis: region, regional products and tourism

Region

Clearly, the role of the region in the context of regional food is very significant. In this case, it is seen as central that inhabitants and guests identify with the region. While identification of inhabitants in the Bavarian Jura region is very high on a local level, identification of the guest only can take place if the region as a whole is visible. The interviewees confirm that tourism in Bavarian Jura needs a relevant spatial extension and a minimum size to be successfully developed. This is very important in the context of a regional brand. On the one hand, a regional brand like Juradistl can help raise the awareness of the region; on the other hand, a regional brand can only be developed if there is a meaningful and powerful topic which has the potential to become an identity-establishing brand.

Next, the functioning of a region is defined through the relationship quality of its stakeholders. For now, it is important to state that stakeholders need a functioning network which should be based on trust and institutionalization.

Regional products

Regional products in the Bavarian Jura region are to a high degree associated with the cooperation project Juradistl and thereby also to food products. This is true for regional stakeholders like inhabitants and producers, where it has reached certain awareness. It is not yet the case for tourists in a significant way. Concrete interrelations between tourism and Juradistl will be discussed with the aid of Figure 3. Several success factors for competitive regional prod-

ucts can be identified due to the following evaluation. Regional products need to have a thematic connection to the existing cultural landscape. They can be fruitful if they are based on credibility, idealism and the capacity to act as experience.

Tourism

As can be seen in Figure 1, tourism in the Bavarian Jura region is not directly connected to regional products. This reflects the opinion of several interviewees: regional products do not (yet) play a significant role in the creation of tourist offers and products. It has to be figured out, on which way regional products can be integrated into a tourist strategy and how Juradistl can help close this gap.

Two further figures which are built upon the first results will be developed in the next step in order to answer the research questions. Firstly, there will be a closer look at the term ‘cooperation’ which is already central in Figure 1. Secondly, there will be an illustration that shows concrete interrelations between tourism and Juradistl.

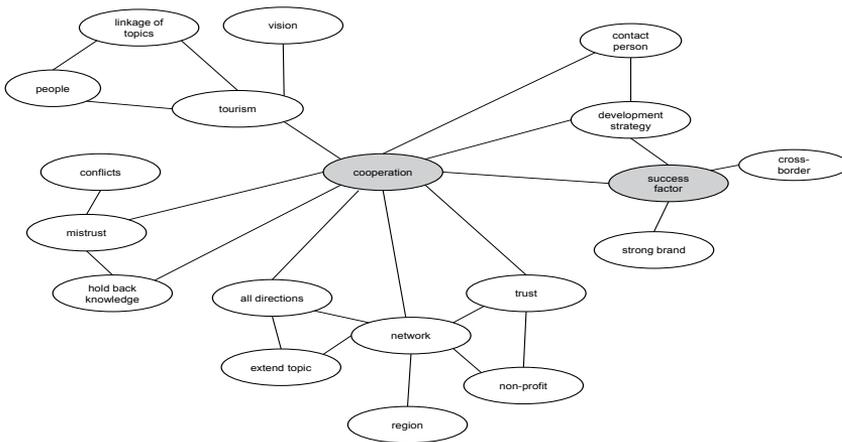


Figure 2: Semantic network analysis: cooperation

Cooperation

‘Cooperation’ operates as one of the key terms in the analysis due to its central position within the interviewees’ statements. A closer look at the term explains some particular characteristics of this study. Firstly, there are some obstacles to cooperation on a regional level identified by the interviewees. Most important are mistrust, simmering conflicts and the restraint of coop-

eration-relevant knowledge between possible cooperation partners. This is especially the case in the research area, as traditionally strong local identity and territorial thinking seem prevalent. Still, there is a capacity to build up a cooperation network under specific conditions. There should be a responsible on-topic institution – in this case Juradistl – that acts in order to create trust between relevant stakeholders. Juradistl actually functions as a non-profit organization which considerably facilitates the effort for trust. At the moment, food is the dominant topic of the Juradistl network. But to establish a powerful and innovative cooperation, there has to be openness for other topics as well. For tourism development in the region, cooperation requires a vision as a starting point. The vision in this case might be a Juradistl-land as a location brand that unites the actual focus on food and other tourism-related offers. To follow this vision, there has to be a development strategy with the following key success factors:

- A reliable contact person with sufficient time resources,
- a benchmark process in order to identify the best practice solutions,
- the will to cooperate across administrative district borders and
- a strong existing brand that enjoys credit of trust.

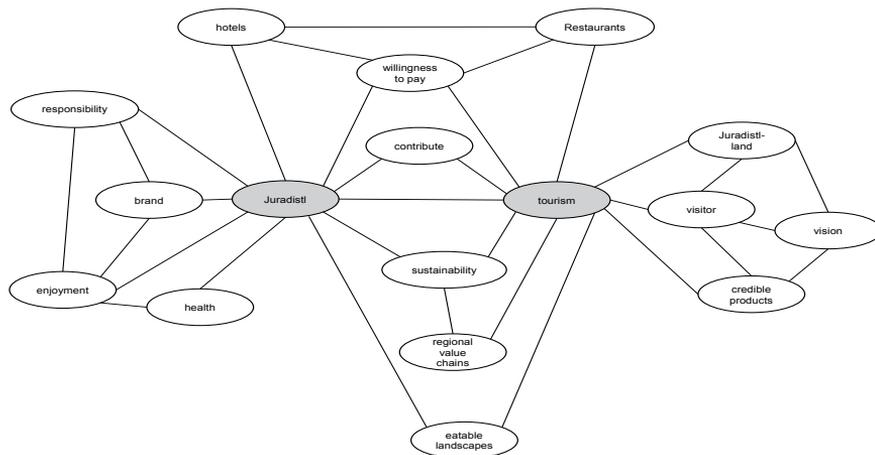


Figure 3: Semantic network analysis: Juradistl and tourism

Juradistl and tourism

Figure 3 makes the attempt to visualize practical propositions for tourism development in the Bavarian Jura region. Therefore, concrete semantical interrelations between Juradistl and tourism are developed. On the one hand, one can state that Juradistl already acts as a strong regional brand with a relevant level of awareness within the region. Further, Juradistl is strongly related

to positive connotations such as responsibility, enjoyment and health. These features all work as promising touristic values or topics. For this reason, the cooperation project Juradistl should be more extended to tourism. Regional food in tourism can be the beginning of this process. Furthermore, interviewees already observed that tourism also can help make Juradistl more powerful because its high quality products cost a higher price. In the case study area, guests from surrounding metropolitan areas are more willing to pay such prices than locals. This is why restaurants and hotels already and increasingly will act as pillars in the concept of Juradistl.

To reinforce this cooperation, regional value chains have to be promoted under the general aspect of 'eatable landscapes'. The term sustainability in this context can be enriched with concrete measures and credible products. All of this may help to make tourism in Bavarian Jura region more sustainable without overemphasizing the sustainability discussion.

Finally, a concrete future perspective for Juradistl can be extracted from the interviewees' statements. Tourists and guests ask for trustful products starting with food through to other elements of the touristic offer. A vision for the Bavarian Jura region can be the above mentioned Juradistl-land, with specialized offers in activity and family tourism.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As it has been shown, Juradistl has the potential to advance and to act as regional platform also for tourism development by pursuing the three following goals:

1. Advancement on a spatial level: Juradistl still concentrates on a core area in the southern part of the Bavarian Jura region.
2. Advancement on a product-development level: Juradistl can evolve beyond its focus on food to new tourism-relevant products.
3. Advancement of cooperations in tourism with the aid of networks based on Juradistl.

To reinforce the interconnections between tourism and regional development, a specific typology, developed by Pechlaner, Herntrei and Kofink (2009), can be applied for this case. With its aid, spaces in tourism can be systematized and strategies for the development of touristic products can be found (Figure 4).

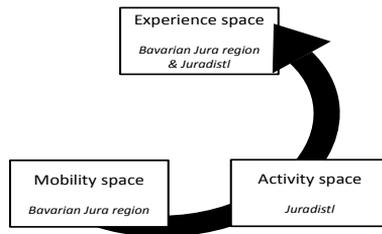


Figure 4. Typologies of space in the tourism of Bavarian Jura region. Source: referring to Pechlaner, Herntrei and Kofink (2009)

In this, very basically, the mobility space has to be considered. This includes the entirety of the requirements that allow social mobility (Urry, 2002) and spatial mobility (Gerike & Becker, 2000). Good physical access to touristic products is essential, especially for touristic products in the Bavarian Jura region. Relevant target groups for Juradistl products are daily visitors from the surrounding metropolitan areas. This access is already given to a satisfying extent, but is not sufficient for touristic success within the region.

Besides mobility, the possible activities within the space also have to be taken into consideration. An activity space (Schlich et al., 2004) can be generated for a destination. Target-group-specific activities within the Bavarian Jura region still offer potential to be augmented. Topics like cycling, hiking and cultural events go together brilliantly with food products and can be integrated in this way in a Juradistl platform. This proposition was also mentioned by the interviewees and correlates with the success factors discussed in Figure 2.

The creation of experience is seen as a major perspective for the regional tourism development by linking the networks of Juradistl and the Bavarian Jura region. Regional products have to be made alive for guests. To achieve this, an experience space (Lorentzen et al., 2007) must be created. Experiences should not only focus on local events like eating Juradistl products in a restaurant, but should contribute to the augmentation of the touristic value added to a whole region. Dense networks of attraction points have to be developed and coordinated for this reason (Pechlaner et al., 2012b). Planning and product development should work together very closely. Juradistl can act integratively, because it is provided by public institutions responsible for planning-processes and because it has the potential to develop products strategically. In the touristic development of the Bavarian Jura region, there has to be a powerful

coordinator who brings together institutions and tourist product development by conducting and developing an efficient and on-topic network. The actual value of Juradistl should be the starting point for this.

This case study was intended to show a viable way that regional food and rural tourism can be brought together in different regions. Key success factors not only work for the examined Jura Region. Through the cooperation platform Juradistl, it was possible to show that tourist developments in rural areas are based on the regional values and resources. Especially the non-industrialized quality food production seems to be a good topic to illustrate that tourist and non-tourist stakeholders have common interests and that they mutually contribute in a positive way on regional development. For that purpose, it is very important to equip such platforms with own scope of action and with appropriate financial resources. The right balance between public and private funds has to be found in each case as unilateral dependencies are not desirable. Possible weaknesses have to be analyzed. By this, such platforms can make a valuable contribution to Regional Governance and the development of the destination.

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