The influence of agritourism and its parallel activities on the differentiation of the rural system in disadvantaged areas of Greece.

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Abstract

Agritourism and its parallel activities can contribute to local development in disadvantaged mountainous or island areas, where the possibilities for occupation in agricultural sector are limited. This study examines the role of agritourism and its parallel activities as a part of livelihood rural system which revitalises disadvantaged areas and prevents their desertion. In addition, the study outlines the involvement of the rural family and its members with multiple agricultural and agritouristic activities in order to become financially self-sufficient and socially reinstated. Three relevant case studies are presented. In the first case, a young man would leave the village and seek for a job in a city if it was not for agritourism, and in the other two cases the contribution of agritourism in ten rural communities of the Pylio, a mountainous area of Greece, that offer agritourism establishments was found to be on average 47.2% of the total family income, while in the mountainous area of Evrytania the main income of twelve rural communities that provide 40 agritourism establishments was found to come mainly from agritourism. These case studies show how agritourism and its parallel activities can contribute to the development of rural systems and therefore moderate the danger of desertion of disadvantaged mountainous or island areas.

Keywords: Agritourism; Rural; Livelihood; Development; System

1. Introduction

Rural areas are continuously in search of new opportunities for economic development. A sector that draws the attention of economic development services is that of integrated regional development. In many rural areas, where the welfare and food security cannot just be assessed in terms of local crop and livestock production systems, the existence of non-farm income sources and assets is of a great importance for a successful local development. This process, by which families in rural areas are involved into different farm and non-farm activities in order to survive and to improve their standards of living, is defined as a livelihood strategy. Agritourism, as a part of livelihood system within the rural sector, can be an appropriate 'tool' for integrated local development in socioeconomicaly mountainous or island disadvantaged areas (Corbett, 1996).

In particular, the last few years have seen the growth of intense local and state interest in the development of agritourism, in an attempt to function as a supplementary economic activity and not as a rival to agricultural occupations. Indeed, a small percentage of farmers in the above areas is turning to agritourism, which they use as a secondary seasonal occupation, in order to supplement their income from agricultural activities (Kloeze 1995, Logothetis 1988, Kockel 1994, Apostolopoulos & Giagou 1998).

Agriculture and tourism are two sectors that influence each other by means of agritourism. Agritourism provides the flexibility to engage in parallel activities, in the cases where the possibilities for occupation in farms are limited, thus in this manner, agritourism can contribute to the preservation of smaller farms and prevent them from being supplanted. In addition, it contributes to the preservation of an acceptable population level in rural areas, since it offers the possibility to earn a family income comparable to that of urban incomes. Moreover, it can play a significant role in the preservation of the ecological and social balance of disadvantaged and under - populated areas, thus moderating the danger of desertion (Alexopoulos, 1997).

In light of the above, agritourism, with all the corresponding parallel activities that develop, influences and diversifies the large - scale system of agricultural production that exists as a traditional production system, and such differentiation passes through the multiple activities of the residents of the above areas (Apostolopoulos & Mergos, 1997).

Therefore, this study attempts to record the influence of agritourism on the differentiation of the rural system in disadvantaged areas in Greece. This impact, largely positive, is strengthened to a much greater extent through the operation of activities parallel to agritourism, such as rural home crafts and small industry, as well as traditional folk art. These extra activities offer to rural households more capabilities to improve their livelihood security and to raise their living of standards (Ellis 1998, Apostolopoulos & Giagou 1997).

2. Agritourism and Activities Parallel to it: Theoretical Foundation

Agritourism is a form of alternative and soft tourism that was developed, on the one hand, as a result of the need of large urban and industrial center residents to find themselves close to nature and in a peaceful environment, and on the other hand, as a result of the need of rural residents to seek income to supplement their income from

agriculture. More specifically, agritourism as a livelihood strategy of rural households is defined as the process by which rural families are involved into different economic and social activities in order to survive and to improve their standards of living. In the attempt to satisfy these needs, agritourism accommodations are constructed with respect for the environment and new services are offered in the countryside, for all those who wish to escape from the hecting environment and the problems of large cities and enjoy nature (Ellis 1998, Iakovidou 1988, Apostolopoulos & Giagou, 1997).

Income from agriculture in disadvantaged areas is continually shrinking and for this reason agritourism, as an additional economic activity, contributes positively to the income of the farmers in these areas. The supplementary income from agritourism helps families in the mountainous areas and the islands to remain in their communities and preserve the traditional way of life of their region (Papakonstantinidis, 1993).

Agritourism is a new form of tourism and local tourist development. This new form of tourist development is taking place in a non - urban environment and is an activity for those who work in the primary production sector. It has two aims: on one hand to provide the tourist with a relaxing vacation close to nature, and on the other hand, to supplement the agricultural income through renting accommodations (rooms, hostels, lodging houses, campsites) and through boosting consumption of products of local rural production and local folk art, bought and used by the visitors (Vafiadis, et. al. 1992).
The following are the broader aims of agritourism:

- Collaboration between the local primary, secondary and tertiary sectors (or Service Sector), in order to meet the increased demand for services and products to satisfy the of visitors' needs.
- local development and creation of infrastructure projects to facilitate accessibility and hospitality of visitors to the various areas.
- Development of local initiatives in the rural community for setting off endogenous strengths, aiming in the creation of new activities.
- Attempt to limit, as much as possible, environmental and ecological damage due to the increased number of visitors.
- Supplementing rural family income through tourist activities, resulting in the rise of the area's economic status.
- Attempt to preserve local population in their own areas, by supplying the ability to supplement their income through agritourism.
- Providing opportunities to areas with natural beauty and interesting cultural and historical heritage, through supplying the ability to exploit these resources.
- Advantageous utilisation, as well as simultaneous preservation of the cultural heritage, both local and national.
- The ability to distribute hand crafted and small industry products beyond the narrow boundaries of a rural area.
- Giving the tourists the satisfaction of peaceful and inexpensive holidays close to nature and in direct contact with the locals and their customs.
- Activation of the Local Government agencies and Co-operatives in order to promote the development of the area (Logothetis 1988, Drosopoulou 1989, Tsartas 1991).

In addition, within the framework of agritourism, aside from activities that are directly associated with nature and the life of farmers, there is also the possibility in certain areas with appropriate infrastructure to offer activities associated with the

visitors' specific demands. These activities might be skiing in mountainous villages, sports in villages with sports facilities, camping or trailer parks in suitably outfitted forest or non - forest areas, spa therapy or hydrotherapy in areas that have therapeutic spas, etc. (Logothetis 1988, Fischler 1998).

One activity contiguous to agritourism is home crafts. Home crafts, which are part of rural housework, is an integral segment of the services offered to the visitors of an area, through the application of an agritourism program. Handicrafts, which are one of the types of home crafts activities, offer works of art made by hand, which are associated with the tradition of the rural area and emphasise the culture, the individuality and the identity of the particular place.

Because tourists are interested in buying souvenirs that originate from the places they visit, they generate a new market for local products. Aside from the supplementary income which is generated, home craft products and especially handicrafts are elements that illustrate the history, the tradition and the culture of an area (Logothetis, 1988). In this way, home crafts today are a part of the multi - occupational character of the rural family and at the same time are parallel to agritourism activities (Ryan 1991, Tsartas 1991).

Home crafts activities that have been merchandised, were developed mainly by women's agritourism and agritechnical co-operatives. Greek women farmers had been deprived in all sectors of social and political life, as a result of lack of personal income, inequality in the responsibilities and the management of the house and the agricultural operation, institutional discrimination in their participation in political life, while they were participating in agricultural production. The state, in an attempt to improve the life of the Greek women farmers, created the prerequisites, through a special law, by which a woman in the village can participate in all the co-operatives, as long as she is an adult and works in a branch of the rural economy (agriculture, breeding, etc.). Within the framework of creating women's co-operatives, the home craft or small industry activities of manufacturing traditional handicrafts or preparing traditional foods were developed, with the aim of disseminating and marketing them, as well as supplementing the family income (Drosopoulou 1989, Kaffe - Gidarakou 1998).

These activities include:

- pottery workshops,
- wood carving workshops,
- semiprecious stones, gold and silver workshops,
- weaving and needlework workshops,
- traditional sweets and other traditional foods workshops.

The above home crafts and small industry activities, gave the ability to the woman farmer to get out of the house and participate in communal activities, since she was actively contributing to the family income, thus, not remaining dispossessed, rather contributing decisively to the economic life of the area (Apostolopoulos & Giagou 1997).

Beyond traditional home crafts and small industry, another parallel agritourism activity is ecological tourism or ecotourism, as well as eco-agritourism, which is a form of soft tourism which combines agritourism with ecological tourism.

The visitors who choose the form of eco-agritourism stay in simple dwellings or tents that are located near protected areas such as wetlands, springs, forests, etc., and can devote themselves to various activities (e.g., traditional cultivation or other rural

activities of a viable nature or activities that are related to nature, such as mountain - climbing, walking, hiking along ecological tracks, swimming, cycling, etc.). The farming communities that have eco - agritourism programs on the one hand supplement their agricultural income, and on the other hand protect the natural beauty of their area. The protection of these communities and cultures is of vital importance, and tourists must become accustomed to respecting the environment as well as the people who reside in these areas. Many similar areas limit the number of visitors and set rules by which tourists must abide, such as, for example, walking only on certain tracks, not destroying the flora and not disturbing the local fauna.

Within this context, ecotourism and eco - agritourism are by their very nature, clearly anthropocentric activities which are expressed by local initiative and characterised by sensitisation, training, collectivity, team work and creativity, so that the developmental processes of disadvantaged rural areas can be planned and applied correctly, with respect to the environment.

Home crafts, small rural industry, ecological tourism and eco - agritourism are activities contiguous with and parallel to agritourism. These activities are programmed, planned and implemented within the context of developing agritourism in disadvantaged mountainous or island areas; they diversify the entire production system of these areas and contribute to integrated local development. However, it is very important for the hosts to maintain their own homogeneity and to use agritourism as a means of reinforcing their uniqueness to both themselves and to the visitors.

3. The Rural System and the Role of the Rural Family. A case study.

It is well known that, basically, large - scale rural systems prevail in the disadvantaged areas. These systems have always operated as social cohesion safety valves for the local communities of the above areas (Apostolopoulos & Mergos, 1997). Simple forms of land cultivation and extensive breeding of goats and sheep formed the rural system in the semi - mountainous and mountainous areas of Greece. This system combined with forest exploitation, to the degree possible, while any activities in parallel with the farming - breeding and forest exploitation system were too few to be evaluated. This state of affairs endured for the duration of the four previous post - war decades, and resulted in the exodus of a great number of rural residents from these areas not only to the urban centers of the country but also abroad (Kazakopoulos, 1986).

As of the middle of the 1980’s, and mainly during the 1990’s, the rural large - scale system of mountainous disadvantaged areas has diversified, since new forms of services have been entering into this system. The most significant of these new acts for reinforcing this system is agritourism and, to a certain degree, ecological tourism. Home crafts are developing simultaneously with agritourism, and so is small rural industry. The new system calls for the combination of rural work with tourism, and benefits both the farmers as well as a portion of the urban population that visits these rural areas. At the same time, occupational differentiation offers to farmer - breeders alternative forms of income, so that they are no longer dependent upon agricultural production exclusively. Therefore, the pressures that farmers are prepared to exert in the agricultural market for prices, income and cost formation, are not as intense as those that they would exert if they were employed in agriculture on a full - time basis (Drosopoulou 1989, Iakovidou 1988).

While the rural system in disadvantaged areas is diversified through the introduction of agritourism, the role of the rural family is changing, its members become individuals of multiple activities, young people are more interested in staying in the village and a tendency to avoid deserting these areas is being created satisfactorily; these areas are even being revitalised.

The following can be considered as consequences of the development of agritourism in the family production, consumption and savings system:

- better organisation of the production structure of rural housekeeping with a significant capacity for introversion (an opening outside of the domestic system),
- an improvement in the level of nutrition and more generally in the family's standard of living (an improvement in buying power, making available part of the supplementary family income for the children's education, etc.),
- a positive change in the behavior of the members of the rural family as consumers (provided there is no deterioration of the traditional consumer norm), and
- an improvement in the savings and investment behavior of the rural family (Giagou, 1994).

Beyond the above consequences, agritourism development in disadvantaged areas might give rise to various psychological and social effects on the members of the rural family, within and outside the domestic system. These effects might result in the psychological support and the strengthening of the rural family, in such areas as social acceptance and status, through the formation of new standards and certainly of a modern professionalism of the farmer and the members of his family. The members of the rural family, with the development of agritourism, cease being simple cultivators or simple breeders in a mountainous large - scale rural system, they step out from the sheltered life of every day cultivation and breeding and enter the wonderful world of communication and the manifold interchanges of their life.

In particular, the social acceptance and status resulting from agritourism development proves most favorable for the younger members of the family, since agritourism is more suited to younger generations, which do not accept agriculture and breeding as their only production activities as illustrated in the following case study of a young individual who opted not to abandon his village because he became involved with agritourism.

Mr. S.A. is a 30 year old unmarried, high school educated man, who as a primary occupation owns and runs an agritirourism B&B establishment in a mountainous village in central Greece, which offers bikes for riding and guided walks and as a secondary occupation owns and runs along with his father a local soft drink distribution business. His future plans are to quit the secondary occupation and become involved fully with agritourism. He is happy with agritourism because he can stay at his village while doing something he likes and his financial needs are covered by this activity. If it was not for agritourism, he would leave the village and seek for a job in a city because he does not like agriculture and livestock farming. As a side benefit to the local community this agritourism establishment employs two more local young people.

4. Agritourism in the Disadvantaged Rural Areas

In light of the above, agritourism is a relatively new economic activity for Greece, which can offer solutions to the land - planning, demographic and developmental problem that the Greek countryside is facing. Preserving the population and improving the standard of living, mainly in mountainous areas and on desolate islands, by means of increasing rural family income through the ability to undertake multiple activities, are the most usual developmental features. Of course, agritourism must include all services for accommodation, facilitation, service and entertainment of visitors, as well as services pertaining to the preservation and protection of the environment and the cultural wealth of the country. Creation and organisation of all these services calls for the co-operation of the residents of the community, the local services and the state, in order to successfully achieve offering high quality services and products at affordable prices, linked directly with Greek tradition (Apostolopoulos & Giagou 1997).

Continuous development of agritourism, within the philosophy of complementing rural employment, leads to a series of speculations. One issue is whether the two activities can remain complementary. For that to be accomplished, income from tourism must not suffice, therefore, the farmer will have to continue his rural employment and visa - versus. In addition, the development of agritourism requires additional capital, labour and land, beyond those that are engaged in purely rural activity. If agritourism requires more and more contributors, then it begins to develop at the expense of agriculture, and runs the risk of converting agriculture to a part - time occupation or even wiping it out completely. Another issue is when the largest portion of the agritourism enterprise is undertaken by the wife and the children, while the husband's primary occupation remains rural activity. In this case, it is possible for the youth to consider that the agritourism enterprise is that which will ensure the future, since that is the activity they know, and they may abandon rural exploitation. A measure that can hinder younger farmers' departure from the occupation, is the limitation of participation in agritourism activities only to those farmers who are financially active (Damianos, et. al. 1994)

Agritourism must be a form of tourist enterprise that respects social and cultural balances and seeks mutual understanding between visitors and locals. Agritourism's essential difference is the promotion of a friendly and family environment, without giving priority to profit, which is the major characteristic of mass tourism.

However, some weaknesses of agritourism can be compared with its advantages and they are summarised as follows:

- Autonomous development of agritourism, without the required control and organisation, may create unfavorable outcomes in the natural, cultural and social environment of a country.
- Farmers who undertake multiple occupations are a weak set within the rural communities, and can easily become an object of exploitation by market dynamics, while they are also less organised, have smaller negotiating power compared to the farmer occupied full-time and they don't claim as many of their rights, as they do not expect to earn a living from agriculture alone. The variety of non - agricultural occupations in which they engage themselves, favours the creation of a category of farmers who are not expected to display common socio-political and economic behaviour and, therefore, a common attitude towards the agricultural problems.

It is difficult to find and formulate clearly a happy medium, unless the phenomenon is used advantageously and subsumed under a carefully integrated peripheral policy, which will also undertake softening the negative implications.

Agritourism in Greece should be developed as much as possible, since the prerequisites are available (that is, rich natural and cultural elements), because it gives the rural family the ability to become financially stronger and to become socially reinstated, while simultaneously strengthening local communities in human potential. In this way, a new rural system is formed, through agritourism, in the disadvantaged (mountainous or island) areas, which hinders rural exodus, since it strengthens the agricultural operation, as well as the rural family within and outside of the domestic system.

5. Development of Sustainable Livelihoods of Rural Areas and Agritourism.

European Union and national governments through agricultural policy suggest farmers to look for alternative incomes for sustainable rural livelihoods. According to the Department for International Development (DFID) *"A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base"* (Ashley & Carney, 1999) Agritourism is a desirable policy objective, which can be one of the profitable alternatives to improve livelihood security and to raise living standards. *'A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living'* (Ashley & Carney, 1999). In light of the above, Agritourism can be an appropriate 'tool' in implementing a sustainable livelihood system.

Rural livelihood systems particularly in Greece mountainous or island disadvantaged areas are often complex and flexible. Diversifying income sources, assets and social values can help to reduce the risks associated with bad weather and unfriendly ecological conditions.

The Department for International Development sustainable livelihoods framework is an analytical structure which shows how various factors are related and influence to each other and where interventions can best be made to enhance livelihood opportunities and furthermore development effectiveness.

In the context of this DFID sustainable livelihoods from the livelihood strategies used in Greece over the four previous post – war decades are simple forms of land cultivation, extensive breeding of goats and sheep and forest exploitation and during the last decade agritourism, ecological tourism, eco-agritourism, home crafts, traditional folk art and small rural businesses. The desired outcome of these livelihood strategies are more income, increased well being, reduced vulnerability, more sustainable use of natural resources, avoidance of rural desertion and preservation of traditional way of life.

To illustrate the above mentioned livelihood strategies two case studies of agritourism in mountainous areas of Greece are presented. These areas are the region of Magnisia (central, east and south Pylio) in east Thessaly and the region of Evrytania in central Greece.

In the area of Pylio all the farms were registered, along with those that are involved with agritourism activities. It was found that the contribution of agritourism in ten rural communities of the area of Pylio is on average 47.2% of the total family income, ranging from 21.5% to 70.5%. Unfortunately, only 0.86% of all farms in these areas provide agritourism establishments or get involved in activities parallel to agritourism, even though Pylio is an area famous for its natural beauty.

In the region of Evrytania, which is the most mountainous area of Greece, twelve rural communities provide 40 agritourism establishments. At the same time activities parallel to agritourism have been developed like rural home crafts and small industry, as well as traditional taverns and coffee shops. The main income of these communities comes from agritourism and highly exceeds the agricultural income which comes mainly from raising livestock.

In both these areas agritourism is in operation year around and peaks during the summer and winter seasons. In both areas the persons mostly occupied with agritourism are women who are also involved to a lesser degree with rural home crafts and small industry and even less with agricultural activities. On the other hand, men are mostly occupied with farming (area of Pylio) and livestock farming (region of Evrytania), but they do help with agritourism activities during peak seasons.

In conclusion, agritourism provides people in the above areas, since agricultural activities are limited, the flexibility to engage in parallel activities which supplement their family income and therefore moderate the danger of desertion of these areas. Therefore, it is apparent that agitourism and parallel activities in areas like Pylio and Evrytania can improve the livelihood security of the people and raise their living of standards.

6. Conclusions

- During the four previous post - war decades, large - scale rural systems prevailed in the disadvantaged areas of the country (mountainous and island), which were characterised by simple forms of land cultivation and large - scale breeding of goats and sheep. This system resulted in the rural exodus of a great number of residents from these areas primarily to the urban centres of the country but also abroad.
- During the last decade mainly, the above system is experiencing the influence of agritourism, as well as that of parallel agritouristic activities (home craft, small rural businesses, ecological tourism, etc.). In this way the system is being diversified, since these new activities bring about conditions conducive to multiple activities and increase rural family income.
- Through differentiation of the large - scale rural system, the role of the rural family is changing, its members are becoming individuals with multiple activities, and they are becoming involved in the manufacture of agricultural products, as well as in the provision of services. These new conditions result in young people becoming more interested in staying in the village, a satisfactory tendency to avoid deserting these areas is being created, and these areas are even being revitalised.
- Agritouristic development in disadvantaged areas might give rise to various psychological and social effects on the members of the rural family, within and outside of the domestic system. These effects offer the rural family social acceptance and status, given that the members are stepping out from the sheltered life of every day cultivation and breeding.
- While the rural system of the disadvantaged areas is being diversified, there must be an attempt to avoid the autonomous development of agritourism and to combine agritourism with the primary sector, in order to give the rural family the ability to

become financially stronger and to become socially reinstated, without the risk of degenerating the rural environment.

- As far as the relationship between sustainable livelihoods of rural areas and agritourism is concerned, agritourism is a desirable policy objective, which can be one of the profitable alternatives to improve livelihood security and to raise living standards.

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