



Applying configural analysis to explaining rural-tourism success recipes[☆]



Anestis Fotiadis^a, Shih-Shuo Yeh^b, Tzung-Cheng T.C. Huan^{c,*}

^a I-Shou University, No.1, Sec. 1, Syuecheng Rd., Dashi District, Kaohsiung City 84001, Taiwan

^b National Quemoy University, 1, University RD., Jinning, Kinmen 89250, Taiwan

^c National Chiayi University, 580, Hsin-Ming Rd., Chiayi 60054, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism is gaining importance in the tourism industry in recent years, and farmers, now rural hosts, are making a significant contribution to rural tourism development. This study examines the views of farmers on their new role as tourism hosts and investors in the activities necessary for success in rural tourism. Drawing on a comprehensive literature review, this study presents a conceptual model. The study uses a Panhellenic survey of 174 hosts in Greece and employs fuzzy set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to test them. The findings reveal recipes of collaboration and skills that support elicit rural tourism hosts' chances of being successful. The results support eight of twelve hypotheses, and four receive partial confirmation.

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1. Introduction

Local hosts are an integral part of the success of rural tourism development because they can help the social and economic life of a community by bringing in substantial amounts of money, which can improve the environment and landscape through a higher level of general business activity (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012). Rural tourism, by diversifying the economic structure of local communities, makes those communities less vulnerable to adverse changes in agricultural market conditions. Despite the widespread occurrence and rapid growth of rural host operations and their importance for rural tourism development, few studies analyze the factors affecting success. A model defining which combinations of factors tend to be the ideal ones for rural tourism hosts in Greece is necessary. Most of the rural-tourism literature relates to rural-tourism hosts. Those studies work with different case studies, compromising the generalizability of the results. This study examines the views of rural-host entrepreneurs in relation to success recipes that drive rural tourism.

Building on a PanHellenic usually allows generalizing and comparing the results with other countries. In other words, this study develops a conceptual model and uses fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to test the model. The conceptual approach allows examining collaboration, skills in business, strategy and European Union and

Government support, all contributing to the success of rural-host-tourism enterprises.

2. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

Introducing tourism into farming activities generally requires relatively little new-capital investments, especially in comparison to launching a hotel or resort (Wilson et al., 2001). Rural hosts are, most typically, farmers who work and tend land, crops, and animals. Their participation in rural tourism improves employment in the countryside and provides participants with additional income, which is one of the most important factors in maintaining the viability of rural enterprises in times of economic stress (Nickerson et al., 2001).

However, experts often counter the benefits of rural tourism with two arguments. First, the profits are in some cases relatively small and demand is seasonal and unpredictable, which affects average incomes from year to year (Iorio & Corsale, 2010). Second, seasonal employment is low paid and, in many cases, provides, within the family structures, for little or no direct monetary reward (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002; Vareiro et al., 2013). To address these arguments, several researchers examine the factors of success for rural-tourism hosts (Fotiadis et al., 2013; Kastenholz et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2001; Yeh & Fotiadis, 2014). The literature reports collaboration, skills, and support as the most important categories.

2.1. Collaboration

Collaboration is not something easy for rural-tourism destinations because collaboration requires stakeholders, with often fiercely

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anesfot@gmail.com (A. Fotiadis), yesso5@yahoo.com.tw (S.-S. Yeh), tchuan@mail.ncyu.edu.tw (T.-C.T.C. Huan).

independent natures, to transmit expertise, knowledge, and other resources (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Panyik et al., 2011). Saxena and Ilbery (2010) investigate rural-tourism development and the interaction within local community, which identifies the significance of collaboration for success. Because rural-tourism hosts do not have the necessary resources or the knowledge to develop a new consumer-targeted enterprise, hosts need to coordinate with other entrepreneurs with experience, NGOs and local leadership if hosts want to be successful (Fotiadis, 2011; Fotiadis et al., 2013). Collaboration can create specific standards of quality for an area so visitors can have a unified product and service experience (Cánoves et al., 2004).

The study draws three hypotheses from the literature.

H1. Hosts and other rural-tourism entrepreneurs engage in positive/negative collaboration.

H2. Hosts and local leadership engage in positive/negative collaboration.

H3. Hosts and NGOs engage in positive/negative collaboration.

2.2. Skills in business and strategy

A complete tourism package and strategic planning are key economic resource inputs for rural tourism industry (Garrod et al., 2006). Rural tourism hosts lack the processes for developing and implementing local rural-tourism strategies (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012; Iorio & Corsale, 2010; Komppula, 2014) which causes developments in a rural tourism area's direct relation to personal leadership skills. Fotiadis et al. (2013) develop a business-effectiveness model for rural tourism that acknowledges that quality leadership leads to success. In practical trials, with the help of other external organizations and training programs (Park et al., 2014), significant skills in organizing rural accommodation exist (Fotiadis, 2011; Iorio & Corsale, 2010) and tourism packages offer several activities.

H4. A positive/negative relationship exists among host skills and strategic planning.

H5. A positive/negative relationship exists among host skills and leadership abilities.

H6. A positive/negative relationship exists among host skills and tourism package design.

2.3. Support (by government and E.U. authorities)

States fund programs targeting development of rural tourism in a large number of countries (Fotiadis, 2011; Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005; Ramanauskiene et al., 2006). These programs should revitalize rural areas by creating new development opportunities, providing alternatives to urbanization, and enhancing job creation, income growth, and infrastructure development. (Iorio & Corsale, 2010; Ribeiro & Marques, 2002). Support from governments involving regulations, education, promotion, and stimulation of investments is crucial for tourism development (Conradson & Pawson, 2009). Often, small farms in rural areas lack the sufficient resources to promote themselves or the local community to the outside world; government support is essential for building local attractions and creating public infrastructure. This support, along with the educational programs, increases the area's accessibility and the professionalism of employees in the rural-tourism sector (Fotiadis, 2011; Michalko & Fotiadis, 2006). State and local government support is important for maintaining the environment and the community in general (e.g., keeping the areas clean and beautifying them) to make them more appealing to tourists. The government can also assist in the development of local tourism industry by providing necessary training, education, and information for its various entrepreneurs and their employees.

H7. Technical assistance relates positively/negatively to rural tourism hosts' support.

H8. Provision by the local community relates positively/negatively to rural tourism hosts' support.

H9. Funding rural tourism development relates positively/negatively to rural tourism hosts' support.

2.4. Success and its drivers

Researchers examining the factors driving success in rural tourism (Fotiadis et al., 2013; Komppula, 2014; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013; Park et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2001) suggest that in many cases the main success factor is collaboration (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Cánoves et al., 2004; Komppula, 2014; Panyik et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2001). Others identify support from government and authorities as a key factor especially in the European Union, where a significant amount of money supports rural tourism with financing grants such as LEADER and LEADER+ (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Fotiadis, 2011; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013; Saxena & Ilbery, 2010; Yeh & Fotiadis, 2014).

Figure 1 shows that the conceptual model predicts positive/negative relationships among hosts, collaboration with other rural tourism entrepreneurs, local leadership and non-profit organizations (NGOs); and a positive/negative relation among host skills on strategic planning, leadership, and design of the tourism package. Additionally, the model estimates positive/negative relationships among hosts and the support hosts receive, such as technical assistance, local community support, and financing.

According to Fig. 1 collaboration, skills, and support's role as main drivers to success lead to three more hypotheses.

H10. Collaboration relates both positively and negatively to rural tourism hosts' success.

H11. Skills in business and strategy relate positively and negatively to rural tourism hosts' success.

H12. Support relates positively/negatively to rural tourism hosts' success.

2.5. Fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA)

Ragin introduces fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) in the 1990s and a number of researchers apply this technique rather than the standard regression approaches (Ragin, 2000; Cheng et al., 2013; Eng & Woodside, 2012; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Woodside, 2014). Several researchers claim that net effect estimation may be confusing in some cases especially using low multicollinearity (Skarmeas et al., 2014; Woodside, 2013; 2014). However, the use of fuzzy logic and fuzzy sets is a recent tool that avoids this kind of problem.

Skarmeas et al. (2014, p. 1798) state that "fsQCA is a set of relationships and each set can be either a group of elements or a group of values." Researchers convert all variables into sets, which make the method particularly powerful because fsQCA allows researchers to calibrate partial membership in sets without abandoning core set theoretic principles (Mendel & Korjani, 2012; Ragin, 2008a, 2008b). Three adjustments are necessary when the researcher calibrates the set in relation to points at 0.05 for full non-membership, at 0.50 for maximum membership ambiguity, and at 0.95 for full membership.

3. Method

The questionnaire draws on previous research that examines the factors of successful development of rural tourism. The four areas of

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