



Case study

The phantom of (agri)tourism and agriculture symbiosis? A Greek case study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 July 2014

Accepted 5 September 2014

Keywords:

Agritourism

Tourism and farming

Economic performance

Cash flows

Entrepreneurs' profiles

Greece

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring the profile of (agri-)tourism entrepreneurs and their businesses, to estimate and compare, using a full account approach, the cash flows earned from tourism and (where appropriate) from farming at firm level and to explore the influence of socioeconomic characteristics of the owners and their businesses in tourism businesses' effectiveness. These issues are not sufficiently dealt with in the international (agri)tourism literature. Research in mountainous Corinth, Greece, shows that the relationship between agritourism and agriculture is weak with non-residents having largely exploited the tourism development opportunity which emerged in the area in the 2000s. This, in turn, implies the leakage of tourism development benefits out of the local economy. When accommodation businesses are differentiated depending upon the owners' relationship to agriculture the analysis of their accounts as well as multivariate analysis show that the combination of tourism and farming is able to support the farming households; however, the opportunity was rather marginally captured by local farmers.

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1980s the danger of economic and social collapse of the less favoured (rural) areas (LFAs) in the European Union member states became apparent (see, Fennell, 1981). Since then concepts such as 'part-time' farming, 'pluricativity' and 'multiple job holding' entered the discourse and practice of rural development policies within a rationale of the creation of new employment opportunities which would support farming families to stay in the rural communities and facilitate their reproduction. Furthermore, in the 1990s, the rising environmental problems led to the introduction of the notions of sustainable production systems and multifunctionality which thereafter became the core of European, national and local policies; among others, the diversification of economic activities was therefore actively promoted through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The LEADER Community Initiative is a characteristic example of innovatory actions aiming at the mobilisation of the local populations to participate in local development as well as of the underutilized human and material resources of rural families towards the creation of additional income sources.

In the framework of such policies, rural/agri-tourism was promoted as a tool for the augmentation of multifunctionality of farming and generally of rural areas as it can contribute to employment, the diversification of economic activities and the viability of LFAs (see, inter alia, Contini, Scarpellini, & Polidori, 2009; McAreavey & McDonagh, 2011; Page & Connell, 2001; Park & Yoon, 2010; Sharpley, 2000; Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). In Greece, the development of such forms of tourism was actively promoted (through the provision of economic incentives) in the country's LFAs, facing the most severe structural problems while, in parallel, preserving rich cultural traditions, highly valued landscapes, traditional occupations, etc., which constitute the basis for alternative tourism development (see Arabatzis & Polyzos, 2008; Polyzos & Arabatzis, 2008).

Research in Greece has provided useful insights on the contribution of rural/agri-tourism to local development, the variety of the established tourism-related businesses, the quality of the products and services offered, tourists' characteristics, etc. (for a review see Koutsouris, Gidarakou, Kokkali, & Dimopoulou, 2013). However, some quite important issues have not been explored, and this is true beyond the Greek academia. Such issues concern, among others, the characteristics of rural/agri-tourism entrepreneurs and the contribution of their businesses to the local economy (Getz & Carlsen, 2000), and the relationship between tourism and farming (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005), especially the economics of rural tourism related businesses and farming.

This piece of work aims, in the first place, at exploring the characteristics of tourism entrepreneurs and their relationship with the rural area where their businesses are established. Furthermore, it attempts, to

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estimate (and compare) the cash flows earned from rural/agri-tourism and (where appropriate) from farming at firm level as well as the influence of socioeconomic characteristics of the owners and their businesses in tourism businesses' effectiveness. Research was carried out with tourism (accommodation) entrepreneurs in mountainous Corinth, one of the most well known rural tourism destinations in Greece.

2. Literature review

The interest on multifunctionality and diversification² emerged through the severe criticisms, during the last three decades, addressing the capitalisation, concentration and specialisation of agriculture as well as its integration into agribusiness chains which, in turn, shrink its synergies with other fields of activity and between different levels and actors and give rise to serious environmental problems. Therefore, the philosophy and the tools concerning agricultural development and (due to 'rural restructuring'; Marsden, 1998) rural development have been re-orientated: the roles of agriculture and the rural space have been transformed from production-orientated to novel ones aiming at the satisfaction of consumption-type demands (see, inter alia, Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997; Renting et al., 2009; Wilson, 2007; Van Huylenbroek et al., 2007).

Although farm/agri-tourism is long established, farm diversification into tourism has considerably increased since the 80s as a remedy addressing the crisis of family farming and the socio-economic problems of rural areas, notably of LFAs (Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rich, 2013; Canoves, Villarino, Priestley, & Blanco, 2004; Evans & Ilbery, 1992; Phelan & Sharpley, 2011; Sharpley & Vass, 2006; Veeck, Che, & Veeck, 2006). In the EU, diversification to 'alternative farm enterprises' (particularly tourism) as a rural development strategy has been triggered through the reform of European Union (EU) Structural Funds in 1988, and the subsequent reforms of the CAP (Phelan & Sharpley, 2011). The endorsement of tourism development policies addressing rural areas was founded on the understanding that through tourism rural households can diversify their income generating activities which consequently would make it possible for their members to live in the countryside (satisfying both their economic and non-economic goals) based on agriculture and the utilisation of the households' resources. Furthermore, the sustainable utilisation of the environmental, cultural and other assets of rural areas can support consumption-type demand (and accommodate the rise of 'new consumers'/postmodern tourists; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Colton & Bissix, 2005; Fons, Fierro, & y Patino, 2011); in turn, new employment opportunities and income generation in local communities were expected (see, inter alia, Anthopoulou, Iakovidou, Koutsouris, & Spilanis, 2000; Canoves et al., 2004; McAreavey & McDonagh, 2011; Page & Connell, 2001; Park & Yoon, 2010; Sharpley, 2000; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; van der Ploeg & Renting, 2004).

Several studies have highlighted the multiple benefits of the development of various forms of tourism in rural areas; furthermore, tourism in rural areas, when being endogenously-owned and small scale is considered conducive to sustainable rural development (see: Arabatzis & Polyzos, 2008; Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Das & Rainey, 2010; Fons et al., 2011; Getz & Petersen, 2005; Iorio & Corsale, 2010; Lane, 1994; Polyzos & Arabatzis, 2008; Pulina, Dettori, & Paba, 2006; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011). Cox and Fox (cited in Tchetchik, Fleischer, & Finkelshtain, 2006, p. 12) describe the relations between agriculture and tourism as symbiotic.

At the same time inconsistencies, ambiguity and thus serious debates surround the terminology concerning the forms of tourism (and related activities) in rural areas. Terms such as rural tourism, agri(agro)tourism, tourism on farms and farm (-based) tourism are

used either interchangeably or as denoting distinct concepts, as for example, when agritourism is defined as a subset of rural tourism (Albacete-Saez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Llorens-Montes, 2007; Arroyo et al., 2013; Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Colton & Bissix, 2005; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Lane, 1994; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Such definitional inconsistencies result in a complex and confusing picture; nevertheless, according to Pulina et al. (2006) "[W]ithin the European legal framework, rural tourism and agrotourism are considered as a synonymous" (p. 1007).

In Greece, the emergence of agritourism has been quite late; it gained an important role in the planning of the country's local development policies only after the country's accession in the EEC/EU in 1981, stimulated by programmes aiming at the diversification of the rural economy (EU Regulations 797/85, 2328/91 and 950/97). Within such a framework, till the late 1990s, the relationship between agritourism and agriculture was clear through the requirement that one should be a farmer, permanent inhabitant of the target-area, in order to be eligible to access the available, at the time, financial support/incentives (Gousiou, Spilanis, & Kizos, 2001; Iakovidou, Emmanouilidou, Stavrakas, Simeonidou, & Christostomidis, 2001; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Koutsouris et al., 2013).³

In Greece, the major push towards integrated local development was provided through the LEADER Initiative addressing the development needs of the country's LFAs. The diversification of economic activities was further actively promoted through the third and fourth Rural Development Programmes (2000–2006 and 2007–2013, respectively) (EC Reg. 1257/1999, 1698/2005), especially through the Integrated Programmes for the Development of the Rural Space (IRSDP) also addressing the Greek LFAs. In the framework of these programmes (LEADER and IRSDP), i.e. since the 2000s, the criteria concerning the potential investors' occupation and origin were differentiated: farmers and rural inhabitants as well as outsiders have been encouraged to get involved in (and access the financial support provided for the development of) new businesses in the rural space; in parallel, the local authorities were financially supported for the protection of their cultural and natural resources. However, the terminology used has not been changed; the term agritourism is nowadays used to embrace all kinds of tourism in the rural space and in most of the cases it is practiced more as 'tourism' than 'agri' (or 'agro', in Greek) (Anthopoulou et al., 2000; Gousiou et al., 2001; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Koutsouris et al., 2013). Therefore, following the term agritourism will be used, encompassing all forms of tourism in rural areas.

Turning to agritourism development, an important issue concerns the fact that farmers often lack appropriate skills (Busby & Rendle, 2000); they may be isolated, without prior experience or training in tourism. Moreover, age, the innovative character of the new activity and the lack of sufficient capital (Koutsouris, 2008) are factors that prevent farmers from engagement with tourism related activities. According to Garrod, Wornell, and Youell (2006) tourism and farming, while overlapping to a certain extent, differ quite substantially. Tourism-related activities imply the development of a new identity on the part of the landowner which diverges from that of the 'normal' activity of the farmer (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Sharpley & Vass, 2006). Furthermore, since identity is related to occupation, it has been shown that, on the one hand, the more a tourism entrepreneur the farmer becomes the more s/he dissociates her/himself from the farmer identity and, on the other hand, that s/he restricts her/his involvement with farming or abandons it altogether (Canoves et al., 2004; Evans & Ilbery, 1992; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Sonnino, 2004).

² The further elaboration of such contested concepts is not among the aims of the present paper; for a discussion see, inter alia, Phelan & Sharpley, 2011; Sharpley & Vass, 2006; van der Ploeg & Renting, 2004; Van Huylenbroek et al., 2007; Wilson, 2007.

³ The relationship between tourism and agriculture is explicit in the definition of agritourism in countries such as Italy where, in quite an early stage, the relevant legal framework had been developed with agritourism been, since 1985, defined as "activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities" (Sonnino, 2004, p. 286) (see also: Contini et al., 2009; Pulina et al., 2006).

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