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Evaluation of Hopa's Rural Tourism Potential in the Context of European Union Tourism Policy

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Abstract

Today, rural tourism is supported in all EU countries due to its socio-cultural, economic, spatial and environmental functions and positive effect on developing vernacular building sector in rural area. In this study, conceptual framework will be drawn by putting forth the concept of rural tourism. Subsequently, EU tourism policy will be summarised. Then, the importance of rural tourism in EU countries and the reasons for a support of it at EU level will be explained. After that, Hopa will be examined to demonstrate its potential on rural tourism via pointing out its natural values of green landscape, agricultural economy and vernacular architecture.

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1. Introduction

According to European Commission, tourism is a major economic activity in EU with wide-ranging impact on economic growth, employment and social development. However, common tourism policy is newly developing (after Lisbon Treaty) in EU level.

As an alternative type of tourism, rural tourism is supported in all EU countries due to its positive effect on

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biodiversity, agricultural economy, vernacular building sector, protection of socio-cultural and environmental values in rural area. Today rural tourism is a quite important tool for rural development in EU countries. Rural tourism is supported in EU due to the fact that it encourages people to gain new skills, diminish depopulation, enforces in the rural landscape, rural architecture and create employment opportunities for women in rural areas.

In this study, conceptual framework of the topic will be drawn by putting forth the concept of rural tourism. Subsequently, EU tourism policy, its political framework and its priorities will be summarised. Then, the importance of rural tourism in EU countries, reasons and tools for supporting of its development at EU level will be explained.

In the next chapter, Hopa, which is a border district at Turkey's Georgia frontier, will be examined to demonstrate its potential on rural tourism. For this purpose, first natural values of green landscape, agricultural and economy of the Hopa will be pointed out. Then vernacular architecture of Hopa will be displayed. Subsequently, integration of the rural and vernacular architecture values in Hopa will be used as strong values for developing rural tourism.

2. Conceptual Framework: Rural Tourism and Rural Area

In this chapter, to draw a conceptual framework, concepts of rural area and rural tourism will be defined from the EU perspectives.

2.1. Rural Area

The classification of regions could be changed according to the different countries or international organisations. According to Vanslebrouck and Huylenbroek [1] the concept of rural is associated with transiency and remoteness. Typically rural areas have low population densities with small settlements. The dominant environment is natural and/or the farmed/forested areas. Here has presented some various definitions of the rural space's common features [2]

- 1- *Spaces where human settlement and infrastructure occupy only small patches of the landscape, most of which is dominated by fields and pastures, woods and forest, water, mountain and desert.*
- 2- *Places where most people spend most of their working time on farms*
- 3- *Abundance and relative cheapness of land*
- 4- *High transaction costs, associated with long distance and poor infrastructure*
- 5- *Geographical conditions that increase political transaction costs and magnify the possibility of elite capture or urban bias.*

Today there are different criteria to define rural areas in the world. Table 1 illustrates different countries' criteria to define the rural area based on the size of settlements in these areas. However, this paper prefers Eurostat's "Urban-Rural Typology" which based on a variation of the OECD methodology[†]. EU built on simple two-step approach to identify population in rural areas: 1) a population density limit is 300 inhabitants per km² applied to grid cells of 1 km²; 2) a maximum size threshold is 5.000 inhabitants applied to grouped grid cells above the density threshold. According to this classification, approximately 32% population of EU live in urban areas [3].

Table 1: The criteria's to define the rural area in different countries [4]

Country	The criteria's to define the rural area
Austria	Towns of fewer than 5 000 people
Australia	Population clusters of fewer than 1 000 people, excluding certain areas

[†] For OECD Regional Typology, look into "OECD Regional Typology" Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development, June 2011 (OECD, 2011). Retrieved 26.07.2016, from https://www.google.com.tr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwis_9b9qJHOAhUC2hoKHTNiBrQQFgghMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.oecd.org%2Fgov%2Fregional-policy%2FOECD_regional_typology_Nov2012.pdf&usq=AFQjCNGCjR50HVh8-6wqskREW53hozXC

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