



Farm diversification into tourism – Implications for social identity?

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A B S T R A C T

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This article deals with how diversification and transformation of farming into tourism may influence the social identity of farmers. Based on a study of 19 farms run by couples engaged with agritourism, it shows how the development of tourism on the farms can be understood in a perspective of repeasantization; and how the couples draw on their farm resources, culture and place to sustain the farm. As hosts offering local food, stories, and various activities, they mediate a strong farm identity. The article also explores how farm identities change through three processes by which the ‘new’ work of tourism destabilizes identities. One is a shift in the meaning of farmer identity. Another is the gradual change towards a new master identity, and thirdly there is a multiplicity of identities that shift as they relate to various social memberships and settings.

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1. Introduction

A recent article in Time Magazine features the agricultural crises in France and stresses the idea that it is agritourism that may save rural France (Crumley, 2010). However, from the article we also learn that many French farmers refuse to diversify as they see this as a betrayal of the agricultural profession. That farmers may struggle with their identity of being a “real farmer” when diversifying their farms is the point of departure for this article. It deals with how diversification and transformation of farming into agritourism may influence the social identity of farmers. Based on a qualitative study of Norwegian farms who have been transformed into tourist businesses, it uses theories of “the new peasantries” and a perspective of identity as situated, multiple and relational to explore whether diversification into new ‘non-farming’ activities brings farmers away from traditional farm culture and way of life.

As agriculture has come under increasing pressure to diversify, pluriactivity has represented important pillars supporting farming, making it possible for farms that otherwise would have been forced to disappear to stay in business (Kinsella et al., 2000; Ploeg et al., 2000; Jervell, 1999). These pillars involve a range of activities both on and off the farm, agritourism being one of them. Today, small scale agritourism is in the process of becoming an important activity that is expected to promote employment, vitality and the

sustainability of rural communities (Hall et al., 2003; Kneafsey, 2000). As such, tourism is part of the shift in the economic base of rural societies. Agritourism may be regarded as part of the change in the European model of agricultural development from productivism towards sustainability and multifunctionality (cf. Ploeg, 2008), and it has received great attention in rural/agricultural politics and economics over the last decade.

Diversification of farm income has cultural as well as economic aspects. One consequence of the growth in agritourism is that the countryside as a place for food production may be losing ground in favour of the countryside as a place of consumption and recreation (Burton and Wilson, 2006; Crouch, 2006). The diversification of farming into tourism is in many ways a fundamental change since it demands new skills and competencies and may influence mentality and identity. However, tourism in the form of housing and catering for visitors is not a new activity on farms, as historically people from the cities have turned to the countryside for recreation and holidays. Traditionally, hosting guests was part of common rural hospitality and not necessarily a professional business. What is new is the process of commoditization, the scope and variety of activities and the increased demands on the hosting role. Scientific knowledge about the processes of change, and what they imply in terms of constraints and possibilities for those involved, is sparse.

When agriculture is restructured and diversified, one may expect that the meaning of the term ‘farmer’ will change or at least assume many more meanings (Heggem, 2008). The transition from running a working farm to becoming a provider of services raises questions about whether the farm population constructs new occupational roles and identities. Studies of farm identities have,

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however, found such identities to be very resistant to change as farmers seem to maintain an agricultural identity despite engaging in many other activities besides farming (Burton and Wilson, 2006). Burton (2004) refers to a number of studies showing that farmers resist change that requires giving up their socio-cultural status acquired through productivist agricultural roles. Studies on gender identities in family farming have also focused on continuity and stability, and conceptualized masculinity and femininity as stable and homogeneous and drawn from 'agrarian ideology' (Shortall, 1999; O'Hara, 1998; Alston, 1995; Brandth, 1994).

Regardless of such stability, farmers' identities are not unaffected by diversification. A Norwegian study found that the more hours farmers work outside the farm, the weaker their farm identities seem to be (Watn, 2006). Moreover, the demand on farmers to fulfill many functions may result in more diverse identities. This is documented in a Finnish study where Vesala and Vesala (2009) found that entrepreneurial identity fit well with how farmers conceive of themselves. Particularly diversified farmers see themselves as both entrepreneurs and farmers. The farms that diversify into tourism are perhaps the ones that have had to rely on several sources of income already, thereby not making the transition overly dramatic. Agritourism is just one part of their pluriactive mosaic (Schmitt, *in press*).

Studies of farm women's identities have also been related to activities beyond farming. One important study in this respect is reported in Bryant's (1999) article from South Australia. Creating a typology of farm identities, she shows that 'traditionality' is an important determinant of identity for some farmers, but that a significant number of farmers has identities which she conceptualizes as 'detraditional'. These two identity types are at each end of a continuum of identities: traditional identities appear as given, while detraditional identities are more open to reconstruction (p. 244). Waged work or a second enterprise on the farm adds complexity to the farm identities. Bryant's study shows that there is an ongoing shift in women's and men's farm identities, that they are constructed and reconstructed in a range of circumstances and settings, and sometimes these circumstances may be contradictory. In her study on masculine farming identities in Ireland, Ni Laoire (2001) found that traditional masculine identities were threatened by businesslike activities characterized by rationality and profit; while Brandth and Haugen (2000, 2005) in their study on farm forestry suggested that multiple identities can co-exist with and draw legitimacy from each other. It has also been documented that there exists a difference in identities between men in sustainable and industrial agriculture (Peter et al., 2000), and between fruit and vegetable growers on the one hand and sheep and cattle stock-breeders on the other (Gonzales and Benito, 2001).

In their study from the UK, Burton and Wilson (2006) demonstrate that there is a temporal discrepancy between structural change and farm identity in that farmers are still dominated by productivist self-concepts despite post-productivist undertakings. Nevertheless, they point out that new identities might "increase in importance as the farmers take on new roles and forge new social contacts" (*ibid*, p. 102). Such lingering identities are not unusual, but found to exist also in other life changes or adjustments to new situations (Reitzes and Mutran, 2006). Identities seem to change slowly, and some elements of identity may change while others remain stable. To quote Almás (2002), p. 357: "It is easier to get the farmer out of farming than it is to get farming out of the farmer" (our translation).

There has been little explicit research attention given to what happens to farm identity when farms diversify into tourist hosting. One exception is Haugen and Vik's (2008) study of Norwegian farmers combining farming and farm tourism. Two-thirds of these farmers identified themselves as both farmers and small-business

managers (p. 328). Schmitt's (*in press*) study from Germany, on the other hand, found a changed self-image when farms reduce or abandon dairy production and offer agritourism experiences instead. The women involved felt that they no longer could identify as typical farming women. Indeed, Sharpley and Vass (2006) suggest that successful farm diversification into tourism may demand the adoption of a service oriented self-identity. To develop the farm into an agritourism enterprise is not a single, one-step transition, but a process that extends over time (Brandth et al., 2010). This review of literature on identity and farm change, gives only a coarse picture where stability as well as reluctance and diverse processes of change seem to co-exist. The aim of this article is to supply more knowledge of the details of this change.

Turning to tourism research, there is a considerable literature on place identity (Pritchard and Morgan, 2001; Kneafsey, 2000), identity has primarily been studied from the point of view of the tourists and the tourist experience (Oakes, 2006; Veijola, 2006; Palmer, 2005; Uriely, 2005) rather than from the hosts or workers viewpoint. However, studies that have focused on the tourist encounter have pointed at implications for identities on both sides of the encounter (Crouch, 2006; Edensor, 2006; Crouch et al., 2001). In a world where mobility is the norm, identity is impossible to construct without taking the interactive dimensions of tourism into consideration (Lanfant et al., 1995).

Research on tourism-as-work (see special issue of *Tourist Studies*, 2009) parallels our interest in this article. Veijola and Jokinen (2008) argue that hostessing has become the grounding principle in contemporary work, tourism being a prime example. Hostessing is "a concept of doing and action" (*ibid*, p. 170). It underscores tourism work as "constant care and concern" (Veijola, 2009, p. 120). Investigating tourism work as performed, experienced and reflected upon by workers themselves, is an opening to study identity.

In this article we are interested in how farm tourist hosts, as self-conscious and active agents, may draw on their past roles and identities – even those that they no longer occupy – to situate themselves in a new working role and identity.

2. Theory: the new peasantry and social identity

In conceptualizing the process of change that we are studying, we will draw on perspectives concerning the 'new peasantries' developed by Ploeg (2008). In his work, Ploeg (2010) reinstates peasantry as a theoretically meaningful concept, and argues that it describes processes of agricultural restructuring in developed as well as in developing countries. Accordingly, he sees repeasantization as one of three trends within European rural development. In contrast to the industrial and entrepreneurial modes of agricultural development where specialization is prominent, repeasantization is an endogenous and local process.¹

The repeasantization process is characterized by three elements that are relevant to our analysis: use of the farm resource base, autonomy and value adding. The farms' own resource base is being diversified and combined into new products. Old and neglected resources are rediscovered, highlighting the continuity of past, present and future. In the development of new products, working farm activities such as milking or meat and vegetable production

¹ Throughout the text we use the concept farmer rather than peasant. It is only when describing the process of change that we use 'repeasantization' theoretically. Ploeg (2008, 2010) conceptualizes peasant farming as the opposite of entrepreneurial and capitalist patterns of farming, and peasants are those being involved in a peasant form of production (Ploeg, 2010, p. 1). The distinction between peasant and farmer is not relevant in this study.

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