

THE DIMENSION OF POLICY FRAMEWORK IN AGRITOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine how agritourism as a mild form of tourism, can contribute to sustainable tourism development. The global turn of interest in more ecological and environment friendly vacations has led to the growth of new alternative and special forms of tourism. The main concern is to preserve the natural, social and cultural resources of a place, and this is achieved through the model of sustainable development, which includes mild forms of tourism that fully respect the capacity of the region. Agritourism is not identical to rural tourism but is part of it, along with other alternative forms such as ecological, environmental, healing, adventure tourism, etc. (Bazin and Roux, 1997). The agritourism product is the combination of services, products and activities that are directly or indirectly linked to the particular rural, social, cultural and environmental characteristics of the agritourist destination and highlight its peculiarities. (Logothetis, 1988). In order to identify its contribution to sustainable development a primary survey was conducted using a closed-type questionnaire of multiple-choice questions, which was sent to a respective sample of the enterprises. The output of the survey refers to the steps and measures that need to be taken for the further development of agritourism in Greece as a pillar of sustainability growth. One major outcome is that all the individual sectors that contribute decisively to the operation of a rural tourism business need to be improved, giving priority to information and support in the promotion of agritourism activity in general and the clarity of the legislative framework.

Keywords: Agritourism, entrepreneurship, Special Forms of Tourism, rural tourism, policy framework, Farmer, Law 4276/2014, Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Agritourism belongs to rapidly developing alternative forms of tourism and is one of the most competitive and qualitative sectors of the Greek economy. It meets the demands of modern man, returning to his roots, contact with nature, tradition and the simple philosophy of life that has lost in recent years and at the same time it promotes the model of sustainable tourism development. Greece is suitable for the development of alternative forms of tourism, as each region has a rich natural wealth, architecture, history-classical and modern- and unique local products. For the proper

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functioning of the system, it is necessary to adopt policies that promote sustainability, mild tourist development and respect for cultural and national identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key objective of this article is to investigate the impact of the current national legal regime, which incorporates the directives, rules and guidelines regarding its real contribution and especially its degree of effectiveness in the development of Greek Agritourism. The real contribution of this research reveals the proper measures to be taken to enlarge the contribution of agritourism in the Greek tourism and local economy. Definitions of agritourism are wide-ranging in the literature. The discrepancies found among the various agritourism definitions relate to three issues: (1) the type of setting (e.g., farm, any agricultural setting); (2) the authenticity of the agricultural facility or the experience; and (3) the types of activities involved (e.g., lodging, education). A fourth ontological issue was proposed to be added, related to the need of “travel”, given the use of the word “tourism” (agritourism) in its label (Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rich, 2013).

POLICY DIMENSIONS

Special tourism legislation in Greece started quite early in the early 19th century. The first law was (Law 241/1914). and later (Law 1698/1919). "Regarding the organization of its operation, according to Law 241/1994, a separate Foreign and Foreign Office" laid the foundations for the subsequent establishment of the Hellenic Organization Tourism (EOT). The Greek Tourism Organization was replaced in 1945 by the General Secretariat for Tourism and re-established in 1950. It belongs to the Regional Tourism Services of the Ministry of Tourism¹, and has the responsibility of displaying the tourist product. The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for defining the policy aimed at the country's tourism development, while for the development of special forms with the creation of thematic products, it cooperates with the Ministry of Rural Development and Food (Ministry of Rural Development and Food). (L241/1914). Agritourism is a special form of rural tourism that involves the provision of reception and hospitality services and / or catering services in functionally integrated rural areas which are combined with activities related to agricultural production as well as the protection and enhancement of the natural and anthropogenic rural landscapes (Article 28 of Law 4279/2014) (Article 4 para.3N.4582/ 2018). The activity of agritourism is necessarily combined with the production of agricultural products within the meaning of article 2 of Law 3874/2010 by farmers included in the Register of Farmers and Agricultural Holdings (MAEE) maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as mentioned in the provisions of Law 4582/2018. The National Register of Agricultural Cooperatives and other Collective Organizations under Article 19 of Law 4384/2016 is a continuation of the National Register of Agricultural Cooperative Organizations and Interprofessional Organizations established by Article 2 of Law 4015/2011. (Law 4276/2014). Government Gazette A 155 30-7-14, as supplemented by Law 4582/2018, and Joint Ministerial Decisions B 1145 3-4-2017, Joint Ministerial Decision 12528 / 30-7-2018 on Multifunctional Farms and the creation of a CSF, respectively, are an effort to replenish the gap, as they place particular emphasis on

rural tourism and its subcategories. They clearly define the operating procedures of tourism businesses, their conditions and infrastructure.

As defined in Article 29 of (Law 4279/2014). the possible forms of agritourism are farms, rural, mixed farming and livestock holdings, and agricultural, livestock and habitats cooperatives. When businesses provide catering services, they only have to use products from the Basket of Agricultural Products. As a basket of agricultural products is also meant the basket of the Region within the meaning of (Law 4015/2011). The relevant Regional Council is the body responsible for institutionalizing and defining the contents of the basket of agricultural products of a region. (Article 29 (5) of Law 4279/2014).

The farm is defined as the operationally integrated site of the farmer, registered in the MAEE (Register of Farmers and Rural Farms) under the current system and has land / plot autonomy as in the multifunctional farms of (Article 52 of L 4235/2014). the difference of which lies in the connection of primary production with the processing stage and the provision of services. Development Law 4399/2016 concerns the modernization and / or extension of tourist accommodation and facilities for special forms of tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The objectives of primary research are to identify the profile of agritourism enterprises and to self-assess their place of activity. On the other hand, the recording of the views of the entrepreneurs themselves about their industry and the problems they encountered when starting and running their businesses due to a legal or financial framework, clearly capturing the strengths, weaknesses and issues that need to be met are researched. For the data collection, a primary quantitative randomized sampling was selected to ensure representativeness and to reduce the error as much as possible. The layers were composed of homogeneous groups of the population in terms of some features such as accommodation, cooperatives, NSRF funding, etc. Analog sampling was used where a sample was selected from each layer so that the ratio of the size of the sample to the layer to size of the total sample is equal to the ratio of the size of the population of the layer to the size of the total population. In the present study, 30 qualitative closed-ended questions were selected, of which 21 were single-choice, 5 Likert questions and 4 questions of the scale. The population was 650 agritourism enterprises in the country, large enough to reduce the sampling error, and mainly because of the fear of non-response from all units in the sample that eventually proved correct. The survey time was about 3 months (March-May 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of the survey, agritourism in Greece is not exercised exclusively by farmers, but also by other natural or legal persons who have no initial relationship with the agricultural sector. These are small, family-run businesses, usually houses, small houses, farms or farms that do not exceed 5 acres and up to 10 rooms and 40 beds, and as 2 different crops and 3 indigenous or local animal breeds.

68% are owners of the business either owning it on their own by 10,6% or with 1-4 family members by 63,8%. Few agritourism businesses are investing and

doing business with owners with other main occupations, possibly with a permanent residence usually out of their place of operation. This is also verified in the survey where 55,3% declare that they are not a farmer and 54,3% claim to have an OAEE (Occupational Insurance Organization) insurance fund.

More than half of businesses (51%) are active over 10 years, while others have started operating within the economic crisis of the last decade. A significant percentage of 17% are multifunctional farms.

Most of the 55.1% agritourism businesses offer 51.1% residence and production activity, some processing them at 19.1% (fewer than the producers), a significant 34% has a sales outlet. The percentage of those who offer education / participation in production is 17%, while those involved in entertaining activities account for 31.9%. Engaging in agritourism is mainly a female affair, with a declared or indiscriminate offer of work, assisted by all members of the family. The main purpose is to supplement family income and to adopt the agritourism philosophy as well as emotional ties with the family. The age group that dominates agritourism is between 35 and 50 years with 59.6%, while a significant percentage of 25.5% is between 25 and 35 years. This practically means that the most productive human resources groups are engaged in this form of tourism, a development that is considered very encouraging, because it can contribute to the development of the agricultural sector with a positive impact on the local community, since it creates the appropriate incentives and conditions to prevent the permanent population from moving. Also interesting is the percentage of employed over 50 years, which is down 10%, as well as those who are up to 25 years of age, reaching 4.3%. It is remarkable that the solar team is over 65. This finding can mean, on the one hand, the undeclared work of the smaller ones, such as students, on the other, for the older ones, the concession of the company to the family circle due to retirement with possible implicit participation. The dominant motive for turning to agritourism is, first of all, the adoption of its philosophy followed by a double conscious personal choice in both lifestyle and business. The vast majority of it 71.7% said that emotional reasons were the motivators, while 18.9% treated it as a livelihood emergency and only 9.4% thought to take the opportunity financing. Summarizing that most of them were experienced in business, they had decided to invest in the field of agritourism due to philosophy, there is a tendency to reconstruct a productive model by highlighting the productive potential and investment opportunities, which is particularly encouraging. On the contrary, the absorption of available EU funds through the National Strategic Reference Framework programs is extremely low. Although the majority had knowledge and experience in entrepreneurship the legal framework of agritourism has been pointed out by all as incomplete, the start-up, operation and subsidy procedures of a business have been characterized as time-consuming and difficult, which has prompted several to own resources. Most of the respondents have difficulty in understanding the legal framework, while only 8.5% consider that it is quite clear (grade 4), while the answer to full clarity (grade 5) is absent. Regarding the information on start-up procedures, most of them, consider that they have little or no adequate information from official bodies, such as the relevant ministries and the Greek National Tourism Organization, but also from the Agritourism Associations, Cooperatives, PanHellenic Association of Young Farmers and Business Consultancy Companies. The time required to start / license a business is one year the most and the highest percentage (44.7%) considers the start-up procedures for an agritourism business much more difficult than its original forecasts. Also, the lack of know-how

(23.4%) was a major factor of difficulty in setting up an agritourism enterprise. The areas selected that need improvement are first and foremost the licensing procedures, the funding procedures and training and a large percentage of 40.4% chose to transfer know-how and counseling support for agritourism. Most of the basic funding comes from the own recourses and the family and few have resorted to financing and even less to borrowing. Those who opted for funding said they needed up to a year to disburse. The lack of information and knowledge of funding programs (11%) or the inability to gather the required supporting documents (13%) were minor reasons. The financial crisis of recent years has affected businesses both in their booking /sales, in the areas of payment of liabilities and in liquidity in general. Stated by most was that investments in rural tourism are profitable or will be made from the next six months to four years, and combined that the majority of companies have been operating for over 10 years, it appears that the industry can cope with the difficulties and have a promising future contributing effectively to the economic prosperity of the country and its inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of our research, we conclude that agritourism in Greece is very particular, as it is not a professional activity undertaken, exclusively by farmers but also by other natural or legal persons that do not have an initial relationship with the agricultural sector. Future research on the following topics would be useful:

1. the factors that would encourage more young people (the productive base of the country and the lever of development) to be more engaged in agritourism-such as an extensive survey among high school and high school students on their knowledge, perceptions and suggestions for agritourism.
2. the creation of a specialized model of agritourism for each region of our country based on its special features, uniqueness and its advantages since the natural beauty, history, tradition, gastronomy, architecture differ from region to region.
3. the development and use of ICT tools that will highlight and promote innovative and mainly effective agricultural products, the customs of the Greek countryside and will build a network between the entrepreneurs of agritourism.
4. the set-up of a special legislative framework that will take into account the particularities of agritourism so that it can be further developed and be one of the driving forces for the development of the Greek economy.

The following recommendations have been proposed for consideration. An important development would be the modernization of start-up procedures and the acceleration of grant procedures, the safeguarding of appropriate institutional conditions for the promotion of entrepreneurship, so as to make good use of all the funds available in the programs of the European Union. It is imperative to update the legislation in force, taking into account the particular features of agritourism, in particular as regards tours and sports, the accommodation, production, processing and marketing of agricultural and livestock products. The quality of the agritourism product should be the main driver for its development, which will be achieved through extroversion, cooperation between local businesses, as well as an expansion of the services offered. Agritourism activity is based on the specificity of each destination, so municipalities, regions and local tourism agencies should play an

important role where they have to take the marketing of this particular identity of each locality.

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