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Analysis of macro environmental factors influencing the development of rural tourism: Lithuanian case

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to look deeper into macro environmental factors and to analyse their impact of those factors on the development of rural tourism in Lithuania. The analysis is based on scientific literature (the analysis involves such scientific methods as systematic-logical, comparative and structural analysis of economic literature; holistic approach to the research problem; synthesis), statistical data (Department of Statistics, the World Bank) and mathematical statistical analysis (correlation analysis).

Five groups of macro environmental factors were identified after analysis of various scientific literatures: economic, socio-cultural natural-ecological, political-legal and technological factors. These groups of factors were analysed in the example of Lithuanian rural tourism sector much further.

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Introduction

During a relatively short period of time, rural tourism managed to become very popular and actively used by the provincial culture. Although rural tourism occupies only a small part of the entire tourism market, it is one of the most rapidly developing sectors. Rural tourism can serve as a tool for diversification of the local economy, helping to conquer new markets for local products, as well as an additional source of income for farmers and other

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agriculture-related people (Matekonienė, Navackaitė, & Dumbauskaitė, 2002). Rural tourism promotes rural development, thus contributing to the overall growth of the national economy (Irshad, 2010). For small countries such as Lithuania, rural tourism is a stabilizing factor in economic and social development (Gao, Huang, & Huang, 2009). According to Žilinskas & Maksimenko (2008), rural tourism is important part of Lithuanian tourism sector which affects image formation for municipality and country, and promoting growth of inbound tourism.

The specifics of rural tourism concept were analyzed in the scientific works of Aleksiev & Stamov (2005), Jaszczak & Žukovskis (2010), Svoradova, Palkechova & Viragh (2013). The benefits of rural tourism to rural community and country were discussed by Weaver & Lawton (2001), Tosun (2002), Tovar & Lockwood (2008), Atkočiūnienė (2011); Markauskienė, & Gižienė (2012). Macro environmental factors affecting tourism/rural tourism were analysed of Mikus (1994), Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier & Van Es (2001), Hjalager (2002), Botezat (2003), De Freitas (2003), Zdorov (2004), Barbu (2013), Bianu, Sirbulescu & Chirila (2013). Lithuanian authors Labanauskaite (2008), Sinkienė (2008), Labanauskaitė & Lekavičienė (2011), Markauskienė & Gižienė (2012), Romikaitytė & Kisieliauskas (2012) discussed about factors affecting development of Lithuanian tourism sector, while Žalys, Žalienė & Iždonaitė (2006), Žilinskas & Maksimenko (2008), Ramanauskienė, Astromskienė & Andriūnas (2010), Snieška, Barkauskienė and Barkauskas (2014) mentioned the factors influencing the development of rural tourism episodically. Macro environmental factors affecting development of rural tourism are not widely analysed, there is still the lack of deeper their analysis and evaluation.

The core purpose of the paper is to look deeper into macro environmental factors and to analyze the impact of these factors on the development of rural tourism in Lithuania.

1. The importance of rural tourism

Rural tourism can be defined differently depending on each European country (Jaszczak & Žukovskis, 2010): farm tourism/agrotourism/agritourism (product based on agriculture production and accommodation in typical farm buildings), green tourism (a type of tourism opposite to the mass tourism and environmentally-friendly), ecotourism (includes unique natural values and active promotion of environmental protection giving benefits to local community) and wilderness and forest tourism (tourism form that includes tourism infrastructure in forest areas).

Aleksiev, Stamov (2005) emphasise that rural tourism is a local form of tourism, which is created, managed and developed by the local residents based on the local landscape and culture. Rural tourism creates higher income for the local community, there appear more opportunities to create more workplaces and their revitalization, and the living standard of the local residents is improved as well (Svoradova, Palkechova & Viragh, 2013).

Many scientists (Atkočiūnienė (2011); Markauskienė, & Gižienė (2012), Tosun (2002), Weaver & Lawton (2001), Tovar & Lockwood (2008)) maintain that rural tourism creates economic and non-economic (socio-cultural and ecological or environmental) benefits. The development of rural tourism leads to the following economic benefits: GDP growth; unemployment decrease, i.e. creating workplaces (as well as for unskilled workers) in the related business - accommodation, catering, trade, entertainment; increasing local residents and state revenues; foreign investment attraction; promotion of the development and variety in other sectors (local crafts, manufacturing and agriculture); infrastructure development. The social and cultural benefits of rural tourism include such aspects as: cultural exchange; recovery of cultural activity; promotion of social integration (closer contacts between the local population and tourists), community involvement; preservation of cultural heritage, conservation and promotion of indigenous cultural values, promotion of local residents' entrepreneurship. Meanwhile ecological benefits of rural tourism include environmental protection (protection of natural areas); improving infrastructure, protection of the landscape.

2. Macro environmental factors determining development of Lithuanian rural tourism

Žalys, Žalienė & Iždonaitė (2006) define the development of rural tourism as the searching for new ideas and their implementation process. The development of rural tourism reveals itself in expansion of local infrastructure and the increase of the supply of services in order to attract more tourists and to satisfy their needs. This development requires strategic political and economic planning and decision-making in both the public and private sectors (Lominė & Edmunds, 2007). According to Gunn (1988), the development of rural tourism involves:

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