

19th International Scientific Conference; Economics and Management 2014, ICEM 2014, 23-25
April 2014, Riga, Latvia

The impact of economic factors on the development of rural tourism: Lithuanian case

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Abstract

Authors of the article elaborate economic factors and using calculations indicate the influence of these factors on the development of rural tourism. The research results revealed that the number of guests in rural farmsteads (values of correlation coefficient are ranging from 0.73 to 0.91) is strongly affected by all economic factors (excluding inflation) analysed in the research: GDP per capita, average monthly gross earnings, foreign direct investments, government expenditure and revenue, tangible investments per capita. Meanwhile, the development of rural farmsteads are firmly influenced on average gross monthly earnings, foreign direct investments, government expenditure (correlation coefficient is above 0.9).

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Kaunas University of Technology.

Keywords: Rural tourism; development; development of rural tourism; economic factors.

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most efficient economic branches that successfully compete with the other farm branches of production and trade products (Žilinskas, Petravičienė, 2007). According to Navickas and Malakauskaitė (2010), it is one of the most fast growing economic segments that deals with challenges and opportunities of global competitive market. Skuras, Petrou, Clark (2006) state that tourism demand has more than doubled in Europe during the last 20 years, and “its economic impact is equally impressive”. Rural tourism is a significant part of Lithuanian tourism sector, which differs with its originality, provided services and competitive features. These qualities are very important in shaping regional and state image of tourism; moreover, it promotes the growth of inbound tourism. In

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recent years, more and more growing rural tourism becomes a real competitor to resorts and hotels. It also became inexpensive alternative for holidaymakers. It is business, which covers various activities in one rural tourism farmstead and also forms whole tourism market (Petrauskienė, 2004). Lopez, Garcia (2006) point out that rural tourism is one of the fastest spreading areas of tourism. It mostly appears in less developed countries, where the number of people living is relatively big. It is a specific branch of tourism, for which exclusive attention has to be shown. Rural tourism is based on the development of the whole farm offering the services as well as on the economic and social development of rural areas. Jaszczak, Žukovskis (2010) highlights “the livelihood of country people and stopping their migration to cities has become important factors determining this development.”

According to Ališauskas, Jankauskienė (2008), rural tourism is important by two aspects:

- Rural tourism creates economic and social benefits for countryside. It is an attractive activity type for youth and also a source of a workplace and income for country people. The rush of vacationers affects the diversity of provided services; moreover, it spreads agricultural market.
- Rural tourism is an effective means of saving nature, culture and tradition values. Tourism provides significance to landscape protection, reconstruction to old manors and palaces, the research of social and historical researches and it also increases community members’ interest in nature and culture of other lands.

Radac, Csösz, Iulianamerce, Matias, Dobra (2012) correctly argue that economic benefits from rural tourism can take such forms as employment, increased spending in the community, economic diversification, farmers markets, infrastructure.

The main problem analysed in the article is revealed investigating data of rural tourism development sectors. The data shows that Lithuanian rural tourism development was not that intense in recent years. On the other hand, a growing tendency of guests in rural tourism farmsteads can be clearly seen. According to data of Lithuanian Statistics Department, about 90% of guests in rural tourism farmsteads are Lithuanian people. It is important to identify the factors that determine development of rural tourism, especially when trying to achieve more foreign people. The various aspects of rural tourism development were analysed by these scientists: Skuras et al. (2006), Žilinskas, Petravičienė (2007), Ališauskas, Jankauskienė (2008), Ramanauskienė, Astromskienė, Andriūnas (2010), Romikaitytė, Kisieliauskas (2012), but in general, there is lack of analysis about factors that influence the development of rural tourism.

Amelung (2006) states that analysing specific tourism sector and its development, the attention has to be drawn to four main factors: economic, social, environmental and cultural, from which economic factors have the greatest influence on a successful tourism sector development. Sinkienė (2008) has drawn attention to the fact that a more detail analysis of economic external environment helps to identify factors that influence the growth and the stagnation of rural tourism.

The aim of the study is to determine the impact of economic factors on rural tourism development.

2. Method

Analysing economic factors that determine the development of Lithuanian rural tourism, such general research methods were used - systematic, logical and comparative analysis of scientific literature, synthesis. The article is based on scientific literature, statistical data (Lithuanian Department of Statistics, the World Bank statistics, State Department of Tourism), mathematical statistical analysis and specialized electronic information sources. Researching and analysing the impact on the factors in rural tourism, statistical correlation method was used. The correlation analysis is applied to quantify the relation, the correlation between number of guests in rural farmsteads, number of rural farmsteads and selected economic factors such as GDP per capita, average monthly gross earnings, foreign direct investments, government expenditure and revenue, tangible investments per capita, inflation and unemployment rate in Lithuania. The data were gathered between the years of 2004 and 2012.

The correlation coefficient measures the significance of statistical dependence between two quantitative variables. The linear correlation coefficient is calculated by the following formula (Boguslauskas, 2004):

$$r = \frac{\overline{xy} - \bar{x} \bar{y}}{\sigma_x \sigma_y} \quad (1)$$

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