

Juho Pesonen

Raija Komppula *Editors*



# Tourism engagement: co-creating well-being

Proceedings of the 6th Advances in Tourism Marketing Conference, Joensuu,  
Finland, 8.-10.9.2015



*Editors*

Juho Pesonen

Centre for Tourism Studies

University of Eastern Finland

Kuninkaankartanonkatu 7, P.O. Box 86

57101 Savonlinna, Finland

Raija Komppula

Business School

University of Eastern Finland

Yliopistonkatu 2, P.O. Box 111

80101 Joensuu, Finland

Online publication

ISBN: 978-952-61-1861-1 (PDF)

## **Preface**

The 6th Advances in Tourism Marketing Conference (ATMC) takes place in Joensuu, Finland, on September 8-10, 2015. Hosted by University of Eastern Finland it features the latest research on tourism marketing with special focus on engaging consumers in the co-creation of well-being. ATMC aims to bring together researchers, PhD candidates, policy makers and practitioners to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of themes related to marketing travel and tourism, and to critically evaluate how they may contribute to advancing knowledge and practices in the field.

The conference theme "Tourism engagement: co-creating well-being" is based on two widely held convictions that have emerged as the practice of tourism matures in the 21st century. Firstly, the wellbeing of tourists, destinations, and operators is paramount. The management of a destination's competitive advantage must become sustainable, while the tourist deserves the best memorable experiences possible.

Secondly, tourists are maturing and becoming more assertive. They create their own experiences by activating their own networks and resources. They easily find their way around to and from their destination, and have become savvy decision-makers. Smart and Internet technology allow tourists to rebalance the traditional information asymmetry between operator and tourist. Instead, they now turn up at destinations and often know more than the operator, about opportunities, prices, facilities, and competitors.

The first challenge therefore is, what is wellbeing, how is it constructed as a process and a state, for tourist, destination and operator? How does it relate to quality, satisfaction, recreation and happiness? And what does this mean for the development of sustainable practices in the development and management of comparative and competitive advantages?

The second challenge asks, what can tourism operators do to assist tourists in their creation of experiences and how can they become co-creators of value? In other words, how can operators and destination become a valuable and valued part of tourists' experiences? What are the challenges beyond merely functional facilitation? Although memorable experiences of recreation, self-consolidation, flow, learning and happiness have been identified as the most important benefit of holiday tourism, what is the operator's role in their construction? For only with true engagement can value be created and shared.

Besides co-creation of well-being, the conference will cover a wide range of topics in tourism marketing from, innovation and service development, to tourist behavior and experiences, from quality management, marketing and branding to e-commerce and ICT, SMEs and community issues. The present proceedings provide a comprehensive overview of current research conducted in the field of tourism marketing.

Altogether 119 submissions were received for the conference. The papers were double-blind reviewed and 72 papers will be presented at the conference. We are grateful for all the authors as well as all the members of the review board, scientific board, local organizing committee and all the partners for helping us to make this conference happen. Support from the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, Cities of Lieksa and Joensuu, PKO, the Foundation for Economic Education, Josek, and the Foundation of University of Joensuu has helped tremendously in organizing ATMC 2015. This conference would not have been possible without each piece of the puzzle. We hope that everyone enjoys the conference and the visit to Joensuu.

**Juho Pesonen & Raija Komppula, Juergen Gnoth & ATMC Scientific Board**

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## Can Rural Tourism Satisfy Portuguese Tourist's Needs? Examining Portuguese Tourist's Preferences

*Joaquim Antunes*

*Cristina Barroco*

*Suzanne Amaro*

Polytechnic Institute of Viseu

Center for Studies in Education, Technologies and Health

Viseu, Portugal

[jantunes@estgv.ipv.pt](mailto:jantunes@estgv.ipv.pt)

### Introduction

Tourism is considered one of the fastest growing industries, assuming a central role in the economy of many countries. Over the past years, new tourism products have been launched and existent ones have been adapted, such as rural tourism. The motivations for the demand of these services are aimed at revitalizing physical and psychic balance, under stress caused by modern lifestyles.

The importance of rural tourism has been stressed in several studies. For instance, according to Dong, Wang, Morais and Brooks (2013) rural tourism has been frequently mentioned as an alternative form of economic development in rural areas. Other studies have emphasized that it significantly contributes to the gross national product, wealth creation, employment generation (Choong-Ki, Var & Blaine, 1996; Borooah, 1999) and to regional development (Dredge, 1999). In a more recent study, rural tourism is considered as a diversification strategy that serves as a catalyst for economic growth in remote communities (Rid, Ezeuduji & Pröbst-Haider, 2014).

In the Portuguese case, there is a low profitability of rural tourism and, therefore, it is crucial to identify market segments to create appropriate marketing strategies in order to increase the profitability of rural tourism (Kastenholz, 2002). Despite the importance of better understanding what motivates tourists to choose rural tourism, studies focusing on rural tourism in Portugal have been limited (e.g. Kastenholz, Davis & Paul, 1999; Kastenholz, 2005; Almeida, Correia & Pimpão, 2014). Thus, the main aim of this study is to examine Portuguese tourists' preferences when choosing rural tourism accommodation. The findings are crucial to support marketing strategies and for rural tourism development in Portugal.

This study begins with a literature review of earlier studies concerning rural tourism, followed by the research methodology. In the fourth part, the results are discussed and finally, in the conclusions, some strategies are suggested as well as limitations of the study are presented.

### Literature review

According to Cai and Li (2009) tourist activity in rural areas had a large increase after 1970 in most developed countries and played a key role in the growth of rural areas economically and socially depressed. According to Park and Yoon (2009), just as in many other countries, rural tourism offered opportunities for generating and diversifying revenues for Korean farmers. It is an effective strategy for revitalizing rural communities that have experienced serious structural and economic problems.

Rural tourism activities may include low-impact outdoor sports such as hiking or horse-riding, as well as farm tours or opportunities to assist with farming tasks, depending on the season and type of farms. As it can really complement farmers' income and contribute to local economic development, rural tourism is increasingly being conceptualised as a business model

in terms of product diversification. In some regions, public sector tourism organisations are actively promoting rural tourism, although farmers may not always have the time, the capital and the necessary skills and knowledge to develop the tourism potential of their business (Page & Getz, 1997).

Research focusing on rural tourists' motivations has identified several motives on why they search for this type of tourism. In a study applied in Finland, Pesonen (2012) concludes that the most important motivations for rural tourists are to relax from the ordinary, getting refreshed and sense of comfort. Beautiful landscape, calm and rush-free atmosphere are among the most important destination attributes. A different study, applied in Korea, found that rural tourists are more likely to be interested in the role of agriculture and its associated culture, such as the agricultural experience and rural life (Park & Yoon, 2009). A study conducted by Kastenholz et al. (1999) revealed that rural tourists tend to be attracted by a peaceful atmosphere and nostalgia for old ways of life. Devesa, Laguna and Palacios (2010) segmented rural tourists based on their motivations and identified four segments: 1) a visitor looking for tranquillity, rest and contact with nature; 2) cultural visitors; 3) proximity-gastronomic and nature visitor and 4) returning tourists.

These studies demonstrate that rural tourism offers tourists multi-faceted activities, and, consequently, there are many motivations to engage in rural tourism. This conclusion is echoed in a recent study that concludes that "Rural tourism is a diverse activity occurring in both natural and built rural environments, it takes numerous forms and, as a consequence, the reasons or motivations for participating in rural tourism are equally numerous (Jepson & Sharpley 2014, p.1).

## **Methodology**

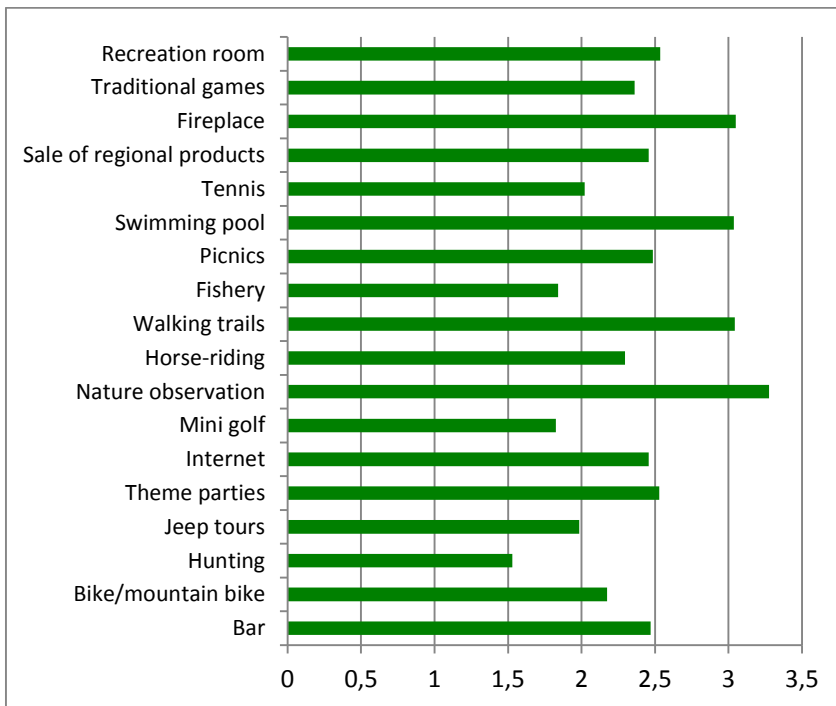
To carry out this study a questionnaire was designed with a set of 19 items related to rural tourism and the environment based on literature review. To assess the face validity of the items, experts who had been conducting prominent research in marketing and tourism, were asked to analyse the proposed instrument. They were requested to clarify the items, and comment whether the items were likely to be appropriate for assessing tourists' behaviour and motivations. After their comments and suggestions were considered and incorporated into the research design, a pre-test was conducted on customers to further refine the list of items.

The questionnaire was self-administered and applied in several Portuguese cities, where Portuguese tourists were asked to classify the importance of the 18 items using a 5 point Likert scale where 1 = "Not at all important" and 5 = "Extremely important". A total of 138 respondents completed the questionnaire (error  $\pm$  8,33% and 95% reliability). Data analysis was performed using SPSS 19.0 software.

## **Results**

The 138 respondents were from 12 districts throughout Portugal. The age group with more number of responses was the age group 35-49, with 41% of the total of responses, while 25% are aged over 50 and 23% are between the age 20 and 24. In terms of gender, there is a slight skew towards a higher proportion of female participants (62%). The sample seems to be composed by highly educated individuals, with approximately 49% of the respondents holding at least a college degree. Sixty eight per cent are married or in a common-law marriage and 43% and 37% have a monthly family income between 1.250€ and 2.499€ and over 2.500€, respectively.

Figure 1 presents the mean values of the 18 items related to rural tourism and the environment. Nature observation is the item with the highest score, followed by walking trails, swimming pool and fireplace.



**Figure 1** – Items’ mean values

A factor analysis was conducted using the principal component method and varimax rotation procedure in order to extract the sub dimensions of the items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic (KMO) presented a value of 0.874 and the Bartlett test presented a level of significance equal to 0.000, indicating that the correlation matrices were suitable for factor analysis.

A principal component extraction was used, after which the number of factors was determined by the number of eigenvalues greater than one. In addition, all items with a factor loading above 0.5 were included.

The Cronbach’s alpha values indicated that the reliability of each scale were good, since the three factors presented a value above 0.80. The Principal Component Analysis produced a three-factor solution explaining 59.024% of the variance, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the weights of the variables on each factor. Factor 1, explaining 22.577% of the total variance, is composed of variables related to the accommodations’ amenities. The second factor, which explains 18.244% of the total variance, is related to outdoor sports and factor 3, which explains 18.203% of the total variance, is related to outdoor activities.

**Table 1 - Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component		
	1	2	3
Bar	,715		
Internet	,666		
Theme parties	,656		
Recreation room	,654		
Fireplace	,627		
Traditional games	,609		
Sale of regional products	,572		
Hunting		,818	
Fishing		,751	
Jeep Tours		,749	
Mini Golf		,627	
Horse Riding		,566	,532
Tennis		,550	
Walking Trails			,782
Nature Observation			,765
Bikes/Mountain Bikes			,612
Swimming Pool			,562
Picnics			,528
Eigenvalues	4.064	3.284	3.277
Variance (%)	22.577	18.244	18.203
Cumulative Variance (%)	22.577	40.821	59.024
Cronbach's Alpha	0.847	0.837	0.834

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

The three factors obtained can therefore serve as a support to strategic decisions makers. The first factor is related to the accommodations’ amenities. Tourists value the basic amenities such as recreation room, bar and a fireplace. However, it is regarding the other factors that rural tourism providers can distinguish themselves among other types of accommodation. Indeed, the second and third factors - outdoor sports and outdoor activities – are factors that are valued by tourists. Rural Tourism has the ideal environment to provide tourists with nature and outdoor related activities and sports and should not be neglected by rural tourism managers.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Rural tourism plays an important role in achieving not only economic and social development but also rural regeneration (Sharpley, 2002). In order to achieve such development, rural tourism providers need to increase occupancy rates. Understanding tourists’ preferences is essential in tourism planning and marketing efforts.

This study has identified a number of factors that are considered important by tourists in choosing a particular accommodation. Rural tourism providers should consider these factors in order to adjust their supply to demand. The three factors identified can serve as a support to making strategic decisions. Indeed, the preferences found in this study show that tourists expect basic amenities, but also look for sport and nature related activities. Rural tourism can easily compete with other types of accommodations, since it has the ideal environment to

satisfy the needs of potential tourists. Rural tourism marketing strategies should be focused on showing tourists all they have to offer.

One limitation of this study is related to the small sample size and the fact that it was conducted in one country. Therefore, generalizations should be made with caution. Future work should extend the preferences of tourists from other countries in order to promote Portuguese Rural Tourism in the International market. Another line of investigation could be examining the viability of niche segments to increase profitability. For instance, given that tourists choices are increasingly influenced by sustainability considerations (UNWTO, 2012) and that eco-friendly tourists earn more money (Dolnicar, Crouch & Long, 2008), rural tourism providers should adopt sustainable tourism practices in order to attract this segment. Given that other factors are crucial in developing and promoting rural tourism and involve more than just rural tourism managers competing by themselves (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier & Van Es, 2001), future research could also examine best practices in Rural Tourism and involve other stakeholders, such as local government and local businesses.

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