

CONTRIBUTIONS OF COUNTRYSIDE RESTAURANTS TO RURAL TOURISM: A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: With the growing attention on alternative tourism activities and environmental protection, rural tourism has become one of the most attractive tourism types over the last decade, and many more studies have been conducted in the field of rural tourism development and in all other aspects except the importance of countryside restaurants (CSRs). Nevertheless, we see that only a few studies concerning CSRs exist in the current literature. However, CSRs are an important part of rural tourism with their specific service standards including indigenous food & beverages, high customer satisfaction as a result of individual service and a natural & attractive atmosphere. Thus, the prior aim of this study is to stress the importance of CSRs and how those establishments contribute to the development of rural tourism. Within this scope, the study is conducted on 12 CSRs operating in Muğla and a semi-structured interview technique is used as a part of qualitative analysis. As a result it's concluded that CSRs contribute to rural tourism by respecting-protecting and landscaping the nature, by serving local dishes made by indigenous crops, by employing locals and by supplying local foods. Finally, some suggestions are made in order to improve CSRs contribution level and rural tourism development within a managerial perspective.

Keywords: Rural tourism, countryside restaurant, regional development, local dishes.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry primarily affects the environment and is also primarily affected from it. Within this mutual interaction, environmental assets which are the natural resources of tourism can be transformed into socio-economic assets by considering the “protect and use environment” principle. In recent years, with the growing interest on alternative tourism activities and special interest tourism, people has begun to pay more attention on some destinations giving opportunity to be intertwined with the nature and serving local products & services, in an effort to attend different tourism activities by actively participation distinctly form 3S tourism. This increasing demand on natural & local destinations has also featured rural tourism destinations. Rural tourism destinations which offer exotic tourism experiences, with their nature and historical & cultural heritage, have a great potential on satisfying a large variety demands of customers.

Although OECD (1994: 8) simply define rural tourism as the tourism activities experienced in rural areas, it is quite difficult to make a common definition, due to its complicated structure and its diversification among different countries (Reichel et. al., 2000; Frochot, 2005; Maestro et. al., 2007; Cai & Li, 2009). However, rural tourism activities involve a journey to a rural area or a place located far from city & tourism center with the aim of experiencing different activities in proportion to daily ones and consider at least one night staying there (Pesonen, Komppula, Kronenberg & Peters, 2011). Further, an activity can be regarded as rural tourism as long as it is placed in rural

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areas by containing small-scaled initiatives and as long as it is sustainable in nature (Reichel, Lowengart&Milman, 2000: 451). Rural tourism activities consists a wide variety of activities such as nature-based events, festivals, agritourism, artistic activities and some other activities towards local people. Moreover, rural tourism has a multidimensional and complicated structure owing to its interrelations with ecotourism, agrotourism, health tourism, adventure tourism and ethnic tourism (Mair, Reid, George & Taylor, 2001: 1; Maestro, Gallego&Requejo, 2007: 951). Rural tourism contains a variety of activities which are integrated with traditional countryside holiday. And, it is a growing industry within the industrialized world, the growth being largely attributed to changing consumer trends and behavior; higher levels of disposable income, improved lifestyles, increases in health awareness, car ownership and second holiday/weekend break markets (Alexander & McKenna, 1998: 203).

Rural tourism activities have remarkably increased in all developing countries from the beginning of 70s. However, rural tourism activities are originally dated back to Industrial Revolution in which the city dwellers from rural areas had a desire to go back to their hometowns (Perales, 2002: 1101). In the ongoing process, most of rural tourism destinations in many countries have started to restructure from the beginning of 90s which is generally characterized by the transformation from Fordism to Post-Fordism (Cawley& Gillmor, 2007: 316). Rural tourism, its contribution on socio-economic development of (rural tourism) destination and also transformation of local/cultural values to value-added resources has been the subject of many academic studies in the last decade (Perales, 2002; Sharpley, 2002; MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Briedenhann&Wickens, 2004; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Frochot, 2005; Cawley& Gillmor, 2008).

Today, rural tourism is one of the most important industries that contributes the rural socio-economic development & regeneration. Rural tourism activities also offer substantial employment & income potential for rural areas where the agricultural activities constantly decrease (Sharpley, 2002: 233). Cawley&Gilmor (2007: 137) implies that the contribution of the rural tourism on rural economic development is significant thanks to its diversified sources and stakeholders. Rural tourism also allows a dynamic rural economy and enables local products to gain commercial value (Liu, 2006: 878). On the other hand, rural tourism is commonly accepted as an indigenous part of a socio-economic structure by adjoining with agriculture in rural areas. Thus, rural tourism activities could directly make an important contribution on the sustainability of cultivated agricultural areas by providing an extra income for farmers and locals (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005: 493).

In rural tourism, touristic and recreational attractiveness of rural areas are relevant with rurality. Rurality here refers to a lifestyle without show off and perfect harmony of a person with his/her nature. In other words, rurality is relevant with a traditional and romantic discourse of the good old days (Kastenholz, Davis & Paul, 1999: 353). The demand for rural tourism has particularly increased in the last two decades as a result of tourists' expectations towards using rural, environmental, natural and architectural sources intimately. On top of providing financial support, contributions of rural tourists to local economy can be defined as creating new employment opportunities and revitalizing traditional local economy (Perales, 2002: 1103). Those rural areas not only create demand for rural tourism but also increase recreational activities and amenities, quality foods and light manufacturing sectors. Furthermore, rural areas could be turned into areas where they

spend a certain period of life of individuals from a different social status such as retirees and businessmen. These positive fluctuations in rural areas create new investment opportunities and new ways of providing income, and contribute locals directly or indirectly (Stathopoulou, Psaltopoulos&Skuras, 2004: 405).

It is possible to mention a number of factors that are important in increasing the interest in rural tourist destinations. The desire to escape to the nature from the city chaos, to taste local delicacies made from natural and organic foods, to meet and experience the culture which is peculiar to rural areas and live that authentic atmosphere are among the natural charms of these factors. CSRs that include and combine all those natural charms are an important part of rural tourism with their service encounter in touch with nature, organic food and beverages and an atmosphere fulfilling tourists' longing to nature. In the context of environmental protection, serving indigenous and organic products at the CSRs also contribute to the sustainability of tourism and rural tourism as a sine qua non for sustainability. Further employing locals at those restaurants is just one of the economic contributions of CSRs among others. Supplying/buying food & beverages from the locals, selling local products such as village bread, honey, butter and etc. are some other economic contributions. CSRs also enhance destination image positively with their high customer satisfaction rates. Since more customers get better service in an authentic atmosphere, popularity of the destination will increase steadily.

In spite of their multidimensional and crucial contributions to rural tourism, the numbers of studies concerning CSRs are still limited. Thus, the main motivation of this study is to make a contribution to the relevant field. As a result of this study, which is pioneering in the field, we assume to reveal some important findings about socio-economic contributions of CSRs as well as their effects on environmental protection, nature-based marketing strategies of them, and eventually future of them.

METHODOLOGY

Population and sampling

This study aims to reveal the importance and contributions of CSRs on development of rural tourism. Starting from this point of view, CSRs operating in Muğla province are chosen as the population of this study. According to the data gathered information from Muğla Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism officials, there are thirty-four CSRs throughout Muğla as of April 2015. However officials have stated that only 12 of 34 CSRs serve with touristic purposes. Those 12 CSRs are chosen as the sample of this study in the first step. Within this scope, interviews were made with an authority from each restaurant.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Interviewing method is used to gather required data in this study. As one the most used techniques within the qualitative research methods, interviewing method has been used to observe the contributions of CSRs on rural tourism in detail and to get precious knowledge from the CSRs authorities. Also, limited sample and descriptive structure of the study was the other basic reasons in choosing interviewing method.

Within this framework, firstly a semi-structured interview form was designed in consequence of detailed literature review, and then interviews were carried out by face to face meeting in June 2015. After researcher interviews, the gathered data was reviewed overall and updated for the analysis process. At the second phase, data was reviewed by two scholar and key terms were determined in the scope of the study. As a result of expertise, it is concluded that the determined key terms are substantially similar. Then, the relevant key terms is classified in three main dimensions which are also the main themes of the study as “*contributions to rural tourism, evaluations of current situation and suggestions*”, “*contributions to environment protection & sustainability*” and “*socio-economic contributions*”. So, the contributions of CSRs on rural tourism are analyzed throughout these themes. At the last phase of the study, some suggestions have been made in the context of the research findings.

Findings

Descriptive findings of the study indicate that the founding year of CSRs generally ranges from 1985 to 2008. Four of these CSRs belong to the owners while others are rented from the municipality or regional directorate of forestry. Two of these restaurants employ at least 30 or more staff, and quantity of the staff ranges from 2 to 14 at others. Six CSRs serve both domestic and foreign tourists whereas rest of them serves only domestic tourists. Results also indicate that German and English tourists pre-dominate foreign tourist groups. Therefore, we see that touristic CSRs operate in Muğla are generally founded as small enterprises and employ less than 30 staff.

a) Contributions to rural tourism, evaluations of current situation and suggestions

Participants who also represent the responded CSRs inform that they contribute to rural tourism mainly by respecting and protecting nature and offering quality service. By founding an establishment in rural areas, they share the nature with others, support regional employment, and enhance the promotion of region by serving local dishes. Hence their statements such as “*There are two or three nice places on the way and here is one of them. If we had not found this restaurant, someone else would build a house and live here, thus sharing of this beauty would not be possible*”, “*I think we mostly contribute the rural tourism by providing high-quality service*”, “*I believe that we help rural tourism by serving and promoting and selling local dishes or foods*”, “*We make a great contribution to local employment. For instance our four personnel we employed at the beginning brought their families here to live*” emphasize the importance of CSRs to rural tourism. Besides they believe that everyone should landscape their life spaces without dense housing in order to improve rural tourism in the relevant area. The ideas like “*It will not be enough only if I landscape here, rather, to contribute to rural tourism first off all living style of locals, their houses and other common life spaces must be in harmony with rural tourism. And rural activities should be maintained in order to protect this beauty. Hence, I believe that rural tourism will develop so long as this attractive atmosphere is preserved without illegal dense housing.*”

After determining the main contributions of CSRs to rural tourism, participants were asked to remark what can be done in terms of rural tourism development. Gathered answers emphasize the importance of environment protection. They have a clear view that each person should be aware of and feel responsible toward nature in unity, due to fact that

protection of environment will not be successful unless all locals and operators adopt this idea. Additionally, participants believe that local authorities must organize some training programs to create awareness about environment protection, as well as continuing service quality improvement efforts. The necessity of improving and diversifying alternative nature based tourism activities in terms of rural tourism development is another important finding of this study. Nearly, all responded CSRs officials highlight that the existence of alternative tourism activities will promote rural tourism in the region by expressing *“Improving diversity of alternative tourism activities will enable rapid rural tourism development”*.

Another emphasized issue by the participants is financial supports in terms of improving rural tourism. Most of the participants complain about the inadequacy of financial supports given by authorities. Normally it is expected to use such types of supports at the foundation phase, since there are some regulations of financial supports or grants for rural tourism investments. Contrary to this, responded CSRs have stated that they did not use any rural tourism support, SMEDO (Small and Medium Scaled Enterprises Development Organization) support, credit support or any kind of public infusion of capital because of the difficulties and inadequacies at the obtaining process. Further, most of the CSRs were founded through the owners' own mean and in case of need their personal house appliances such as refrigerator and kitchen equipment were used at early stages, eventually all other needs fulfilled with the earned money in time. The statements *“Nobody wants to take any risk, since there is not any financial support. And this reality severely affects rural tourism development. Also, formal procedures about foundation and operation are very difficult”* summarize the negative conditions for the CSRs in a financial sense. Thus, they insist on the necessity of enlarging the quantity and variety of financial supports. After all, professionalism of these CSRs and making contribution to development and promotion of rural areas is only possible as long as CSRs have government promotion & support. So, it is a fact that the authorities must revise some regulations in the field of promotion & support procedures for local establishments such as CSRs.

Besides improving alternative tourism activities and enlargement at financial support, participants of the study emphasize the necessity of substructure enhancements. Results stress on the importance of transportation to maintain sustainability and improvements at rural tourism. Participants overemphasize that transportation system should be improved urgently by saying *“we have many problems with substructure. But transportation and accessibility of the region is maybe the most important subject that authorities must immediately pay attention. We are far away from the city center and transportation costs as well as freights are very expensive, so it becomes more difficult to attract potential customers”*. On the other hand, it is concluded that participants looking forward to get natural gas services as soon as it is possible, since they cannot use natural gasat present. Results regarding to substructure improvement also indicate that enhancements on substructure investments are expected after being taken into metropolitan district area.

The last issue addressed at this section is to determine marketing strategies of CSRs. The results emphasize the importance of word of mouth marketing for CSRs. Hence, responded CSRs stated that experienced service by the customers is the best marketing tool. Statements given below support this idea. *“At the marketing process we do not use many tools, only our guests speak of us to his/her friends and so we trust on word of mouth*

marketing. Satisfied guests wistfully tell their positive ideas and nice memories and also by stating *I was satisfied with the service*. *Our guests know us well since previous customers adverted us beforehand*. *We have a certain customer group constituting of loyal ones, and we can get new ones by the help of previous customers*. Additionally TV series have a great impact on promotion, since the participants think that these series are more efficient and more directly appeal the target population than CSRs own promotion efforts.

b) Contributions to environment protection and sustainability

Contributions of CSRs to environment protection and sustainability have been researched from the perspectives of nature protection, planting & landscaping, waste disposal processes and eco-friendly energy using. The results of the study demonstrate that concern about the *“protect the nature then use it”* principle is the first important finding of the study. Statements of the participants such as *“We cannot be here without our protected nature”*, *“our primary goal is to conduct our activities without harming the environment”* and *“our main goal is to protect the environment”* emphasize the given importance to environment protection and sustainability. Another important finding about environment protection is about planting. Almost all of the CSRs stated that they have made planting and have allocated a serious budget for landscaping at foundation phase. Hence, the statements *“in the past this place was almost idle, but we have planted, greened and landscaped here by ourselves”* and *“we both protect the nature and reforest these areas”* are confirming the environment protection efforts of CSRs.

Another issue addressed under the research is the disposal process of solid and liquid waste. In terms of the results, it is concluded that the big majority of the CSRs leave their solid waste to dumpsters without any sorting, since the municipality do not have waste parsing/sorting system. *“Nobody sort the garbage since the municipality does not provide different containers for the solid waste”*, *“there is not any recycling process for the waste, so we do not sort the solid waste. Further there must be a strict policy to waste management and it must be implemented throughout the country”* statements clearly summarize the reasons of leaving the solid waste without any sorting. Participants also state that liquid waste is collected by a private company per week and chemical waste such as detergents are directly wasted to sewage. Thus, it can be assumed that waste management processes of the CSRs and also municipality is not efficient in terms of nature protection and sustainability.

The last issue researched in terms of environment protection and sustainability is the green-energy usage. As a result of the growing importance of green-energy, almost all enterprises have begun to consider green-energy usage as a corporate social responsibility today. Thus, like other businesses, CSRs must also seriously address green-energy usage, since it is very important for the sustainability of rural destinations. However it is concluded that CSRs are using solar energy only for the water heating while they use energy saving bulbs for the lighting. More interestingly, they use air-conditioning, solid fuel (wood or coal) for heating, although usage rate of solid fuel is still very low because of temperate climate. Once for all, it is determined that only two CSRs have fuel gas filter. This situation may seem negative for environment protection, but it should be noted that the usage rate of solid fuels is very low as mentioned before.

c) Contributions in the field of socio-economic development

One of the most important socio-economic contributions of CSRs to the region in which they operate is the employment potential created by them. Hence, employment of the locals and simultaneously increments on the family income and welfare is generally accepted as an efficient way of socio-economic development for the relevant region. Further, the idle labor force firstly becomes a part of active labor force, then began to promote production by starting to work at CSRs. Results of the study indicate that a big proportion of responded CSRs select their staff from the local people except in the case of high season. Participants have stated that they can employ staff from outside of the region when they have to bear with a peak demand. On the other hand, it is also concluded that their contributions to rural employment is still limited since they are family-run restaurants and employ a small amount of staff. In terms of employment, participants also notify that they have difficulties at finding qualified personnel because of limited social activities, being away from the city-center and inadequacy of transportation.

Within the context of the study, another prescribed socio-economic contribution of the CSRs is local supplying processes. All participants informed that they supply the big majority of food and beverages they use in service production from the local farmers. Fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy products are the most supplied materials from the local farmers. Meanwhile, 25 % of the CSRs grow these crops in their own farms. However these field crops constitute only half of whole crops used in service production. The other materials or crops which cannot be supplied from local farmers are generally bought from the nearby professional suppliers. At this point, participants as the owner or managers of CSRs particularly emphasize the production capacity of local farmers. It is stated that the most important reason of using professional supplier is the inadequacy and floating production capacity of local farmers. *“We compulsorily buy from other suppliers, when they cannot satisfy our demands in terms of food and beverages”, “Even though, we want to supply everything from the local farmers, we can supply only %50 of our needs which we use for service production”* statements summarize the unsteady supplying processes between CSRs and local farmers.

Considering the fact that the some authentic or rural restaurants rarely sell local products, participants has been asked to whether they have a separate stand for the purpose of selling local products such as honey, butter, olive, olive oil and village bread. They have stated that there is not a separate stand, but they sell these types of products only in the case of the customer demands. While two CSRs have reported that they sell honey and olive oil, the rest of the participants do not respond positively to selling local products at the restaurants commercially in general. At this point, it can be assumed that the CSRs have some justifications. For instance, they do not want to create an impression on customers toward getting double earnings by selling the same products separately, since they serve local foods made by these products. Rather, it is believed that CSRs primarily promote and market the region, then themselves by serving local foods through combining them with different combinations at their menu. Contrary to this fact, some restaurants serve only certain types of meals while they are also serving local foods. Participants of these restaurants believe that people prefer to eat roasts, grills and variety of fishes due to the natural atmosphere. Thus, they prefer to serve local appetizers and village bread with the meals rather than serving wide range of main courses. These participants also agree on

others by thinking that the most ideal way is to serve local foods (village bread, egg and butter and etc.)with the breakfasts.

Interestingly, despite of their numerous contributions to rural areas, it is concluded that responded CSRs do not carry out or maintain any social responsibility projects (SRP). They just support some charities in case of demand. This approach to SRP may be explained by being a small-sized family restaurant and the low degree of institutionalization. *“Although we do not carry on SRP, we support charities in the region”, “we also support a variety of activities performing for handicapped people”, “sometimes we do not charge anything for the meal from handicapped or needy people”* and *“we don’t have any time”* statements clearly represent the current situation about SRP of responded CSRs. These statements also indicate that responded CSRs perform some efforts (endowing the mosques, giving money or supporting needy and handicapped people) as a way of carrying out SRP. Further, these establishments do not organize any special events or activities for the local people, instead they support some festivals organizations occasionally or they rarely perform small-scaled breakfast organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

With the growing attention to rural tourism, environment and sustainable tourism today, many more studies are conducted in the field of rural activities and rural establishments. CSRs are one of these establishments located in rural areas which serve local dishes. So, these types of establishments constitute an important part of the rural tourism. Hence,many studies in this field are expected to be conducted. Unfortunately the number of the studies concerning CSRs and their contribution to rural tourism is still very limited. Thus this study has been conducted in order to determine the contributions of CSRs on rural tourism in terms of sustainability, environment management and socio-economic development. Findings of the study indicate that;

- CSRs operating in Muğla are aware of the importance of protecting nature meanwhile they are using this attractive atmosphere presented by the nature.
- Respecting and protecting the operating nature as well as landscaping and high-level service quality are means of contributing to the rural tourism for these establishments.
- Although these establishments directly contribute local employment by selecting their staff from the locals, they barely find qualified staff. Difficulties at finding qualified personnel basically originate from being distant from the city center and very limited social activity opportunities. Furthermore, most of them operate as family companies and this fact cause a limited contribution to local employment.
- Responded CSRs market and promote themselves by word of mouth marketing mostly. In other words, they consider their newcomers and loyal customers are the most important marketing tool.
- Substructure and transportation problems seen in the area lead to a decrease on rural tourism demand, and correspondingly regional development cannot increase as planned. Additionally, diversification of rural tourism activities performed in relevant area and social activities are very important for the promotion.

- There are some problems at waste management for the CSRs such as parsing/sorting the solid waste and inadequacy of liquid waste collection which are undesirable for rural tourism development.
- Inadequate and unsteady local production of organic and endemic food constrains responded CSRs to use professional suppliers or to buy from somewhere else.
- Responded CSRs generally do not want to sell any indigenous crop since they find it as unethical and interpret as unfair profit.
- However respondents emphasize that they care about the “protect and use the nature” principle but they do not care enough at supplying and using green energy.
- Responded CSRs approach social responsibility efforts positively. But the quantity of these types of efforts is still very limited as a result of mistakable aim of the SRP.

Findings of the study listed above clearly demonstrate that formal/local authorities must support this types of attempts financially and morally. Because, idle rural tourism potential can be set into motion by supporting these attempts and improve rural activities in accordance with alternative tourism facilities. Additionally owners or managers of CSRs and authorities should take into considerationsuggestions mentioned below.

- Government incentives and promotions to rural tourism must be revised in terms of their allowed amount and procedural simplification.
- Waste management is one of the most neglected issues by the CSRs operators. Thus, local government units should carry out comprehensive waste management programs including formal procedures and collecting efforts.
- For the CSRs, it is very important to maintain basic activities by considering ecological balance and sustainability. Thus, each CSR must fulfill its responsibility for sustainability.
- Overcoming the substructure-superstructure and transportation problems is very important within the context of discharging accessibility principle which is one of touristic attraction elements. Hence, a rural destination or a region can create touristic demand as long as it is accessible for everyone.
- Considering that the local dishes is the most valuable service tool of CSRs, local authorities and farmers should increase the supplement capacity and quality of local crops. Also, incentives and promotions provided in this field actively should be actively used by farmers.
- Although green energy usage is very important for all business, it is particularly vital for the companies whose unique capital is nature. In all circumstances where the energy demand continuously increases and alternative energy resources are important, these types of companies located in nature must be pioneers at green energy usage in order to protect the nature which is our common heritage.

Eventually, it must be noted that this is a descriptive study tackling the contributions of CSRs in the frame of participants’ ideas. Thus, this study does not contain any comparative or causation results. Indeed it summarizes the current situation and brings some suggestions to help the development of rural tourism. So, more descriptive studies as well as comparative researches should be conducted in order to understand the contribution levels of CSRs on rural tourism. Also some studies involving quantitative and qualitative research methods simultaneously must be conducted in order to gather detailed knowledge

from relevant establishments. We assume that this study can also help the authorities or operators in terms of its findings and suggestions that have been made within a managerial approach.

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