

Rural Tourism in developed, developing and LDC's: A critical review of Literature

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Abstract

Rural tourism is a new niche which has emerged in tourism. It has emerged for developing the rural areas which has potential for tourism. It may be defined as any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. But, this form of tourism is such a multifaceted activity and varies in developed, developing and least developed countries. This research paper is an effort in this direction and tries to critically review the literature from the perspective of developed, developing and least developed nations. It tries to justify the implementation of rural tourism in these countries.

Keywords: Rural tourism; developed, developing and least developed nations.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is a new niche which came like a wave in the tourism domain in 1970's, 1980's & 1990's. According to Lane (2009) this wave started from Western Europe and slowly spread to the whole world. But, rural places have been associated with tourism from ancient times. Visits to rural places were part of Grand tours and Thomas Cook too organised tours to rural locations. Presently, the context of rural tourism has come in the modern world so that the benefits of the tourism could be passed on to the rural economy. It involves the soul of Tourism in the body of rural infrastructure. Basically, rural tourism focuses on tourism activity in rural environment. In rural tourism, the main focus is on the rural environment, culture, traditions, ethnicity, language, heritage, role of Agriculture, songs, dances, local cuisines made in traditional setup, folklores, costumes and even the domestic architecture. But apart, from all these aspects, rural tourism has also got socio-economic aspect in which rural people can also get source of income without doing extra-ordinary things. It can act as impetus to rural areas which are poor & lack economic stability. Rural tourism is a community based tourism, in which people support plays an important role for its successful implementation. Community involvement is not only vital for sustainability & carrying capacity perspective but also important in terms of economic stability and strengthening the

social fabric of the village. The industrial revolution and better means of transport & communication has further enhanced the scope of rural tourism. Organisation for economic co-operation and development located in Paris was one of the leading organizations which in 1994 under Mr. Bernard lane began to probe that whether tourism would be able to generate benefits to the rural areas. Great benefits are attributed to growth of tourism in rural areas, but growth in rural areas due to tourism is difficult to quantify as there are no statistics available which differentiates rural tourism from other forms of tourism.

Rural tourism is a multifaceted activity comprising a gamut of activities and services, managed by local community, displaying rural life, art, culture and heritage. But there has been lot of problems defining the concept universally due to the varied nature of tourism product, concept of rurality, different perspectives of the stakeholders, the extent of involvement of local community, type of infrastructure and degree of commercial aspect involved. Also, the definition of each nation or even regions within a nation varies depending upon the cultural and rural attributes of the place. The definition of rural tourism has been subject to many arguments in the various research articles & not reached a common agreement (Pearce, 1982 & 1998; Bramwell, 1994; Komilis, 1994). The rural tourism concept differs in developed, developing and poor countries.

2. Objectives of the study

The study is based on review of literature on rural tourism with twofold objective i.e. to review the literature of rural tourism and secondly to highlight the perspective of implementing rural tourism in developed, developing and least developed nations.

3. Concept of rural tourism

Rural tourism is one of the upcoming fields in tourism development process. It has been duly supported by destinations, marketers, planners and by community. This form of tourism is helpful in generating the benefits to the local community and thus contributing for the sustainable development of tourism. Rural tourism is defined in a number of ways due to the variable tourism product present in the rural areas of the world. The concept of rural tourism varies from place to place. It is different for developed, developing and poor nations.

Developed Nations

In 1994, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in its report on Tourism strategies and rural Development clearly stated that for the rural regions of the developed world, the issues of population decline, economic change and community regeneration are universal. And the reasons for all these changes are rapid industrialization, urbanization and technological changes which has led to fall in farm incomes; reduction in rural service provision; fall and aging of rural population and even some areas struggle to retain their viability (Lane, 2005; Quoted in Alberta Tourism 2010). And in order to address these issues, various strategies are being worked out. Rural tourism is one such strategy by which all above issues can be taken care off. Also, counter-urbanisation has resulted in demand for rural areas and rural tourism. Further, the increase in disposable income; shorter working hours, increasing

numbers of paid holidays; higher levels of education and better accessibility have further influenced the pace of tourism development. In case of some developed countries below, the concept of rural tourism has been described.

England

According to “Visit Britain” the national tourism agency, rural tourism may be defined as a variety of visits away from home to locations outside main towns and seaside resorts, be they holidays, day trips, business trips or to visit friends and relatives’ (Working for the Countryside: A strategy for rural tourism in England 2001-2005, 2001) as well as ‘tourism where enjoyment of the countryside is the primary motive (Qualitative Research on Rural Tourism in England, 2002). According to English Tourism Council research project on rural tourism described the concept of rural tourism as ‘peace and quiet’, ‘slower pace of life’, ‘fresh air’, ‘non-urbanised’ and ‘lots of space.’ This research also stated that rural tourism could encompass ‘gentle’ countryside (farms, fields, and cows), ‘rugged’ countryside (moors, hills, and mountains), coastal areas and non-urbanised towns and villages (Qualitative Research on Rural Tourism in England, 2002).

France

In France the concept of rural tourism started 60 years ago and the rural areas form about 80% of the French territory. Also, the maximum visitors to these regions are French i.e. about three fourth (3/4th) of the visitors. Much growth in France to rural tourism is attributed to paid holiday concept, subsidies, funds from European funds, leader programs and promotion of a national label (1988) the Bienvenue à la Ferme network managed by the Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d'Agriculture and local state-run organisations, providing support to farmers who are looking to diversify into tourism. According to the French Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry the so-called rural tourism refers to farm tourism, wine tourism, glamping (“glamour”+”camping”), agritourism, etc., all the manifestations of “the love for nature and true things” (Taunay, 2014).

Spain

Rural tourism increased phenomenally in Spain like other developed countries in 1970’s, but tourism in rural areas also existed in earlier times. Generally two types of rural tourism have been witnessed i.e. home coming rural tourism and the modern rural tourism (Perales, 2002). The former involved the visits by urban dwellers, who belonged to rural areas for spending their breaks while the latter involved increased visits of the urbanites to rural areas for search of environment & authentic due to increased urbanisation and stress created due to stressful life. The nature of product in Spain broadly can be divided into natural resources i.e. Recurnat; monument & folklore i.e. Monufolk and activities such as trekking, biking etc (Perales, 2002)

Hungary

In Hungary, the rural tourism is a type of tourist activity which provides additional income for other professions like agriculture industry etc., by using rural accommodations and keep the atmosphere and environment of the rural areas unharmed (Csizmadia,1992), (Könyves, 2002).

Italy

Italy is county full of beautiful rural locations whether it is Sicily, Adriatic Coast, Piedmont,

Tuscany, Lazio, Basilicata, Calabria or Sardinia. It is the only country in European Union which has laws for Agritourism, a subtype of rural tourism. Here the history of farm tourism is very old and associated with the Philosophical movement of Romanticism. There is great Heterogeneity of agritourism such as farm houses, teaching farms, productive co-operative farms, organic agritourism etc.

In the European Union the rural tourism concept has been greatly developed in Austria and France. These countries are tapping the tourism and at the same time providing economic avenues to the rural people. The local people even get benefitted though government subsidies and loans (Kiper, Ozdemir & Saglam, 2012). In Europe as a whole, the rural tourism is tourism in countryside areas, which have attributes such a cultural, traditional, heritage, agricultural locations, natural or remote areas (EC,2000). In Europe ‘rural tourism’ is typically used to illustrate agritourism (tourism on farms) although it spread out to cover essentially all sightseeing or tourism activities in the countryside when necessary (Knowd, 2003). The European Union accomplishes special ventures under Leader Program and highlights local involvement in product offering, management and control. It classifies tourism in two ways i.e. firstly on the percentage of revenues that benefit the rural community and as a type comes in between agritourism and countryside tourism; secondly on the basis on elements that constitute the rural tourism such as culture, traditions, activity, and lifestyle of hosts’ etc and has a strong educational element attached with it (Knowd, 2003)

Australia

In Australia rural tourism has been described as:

“A multi-faceted activity which occurs in surroundings outside an urbanized area and gives the traveller the experience of country life” (DOT, 1993; DOT, 1994 as cited in Knowd, 2001). And “Rural tourism is something which attracts tourists further than the urban areas and expands to both natural and built environments, including the activities purposely designed for tourism” (DOT, 1995 as cited in Knowd, 2001). In totality, the rural tourism according to Ian Knowd’s document “Rural Tourism: Panacea and Paradox” in Australia can be represented in Fig. 1.

In 2001, Ian Knowd exploring the phenomenon of Rural Tourism and Tourism’s Interaction with Host Rural Communities describes defining rural tourism as a thorny issue. However, by correlating the definitions given by various academias, researchers and organizations an image of what rural tourism is and elements of rural tourist experience can be created. According to him, “rural tourism is present in agricultural landscapes and is characterized by enjoyment of a tamed nature or highly modified landscape. It is about land use, human cultures and their interaction. It positions agriculture and farms as the foundation upon which the attraction is built. And the overall rural tourism product fall in three domains- Core, Auxiliary and Augmented.

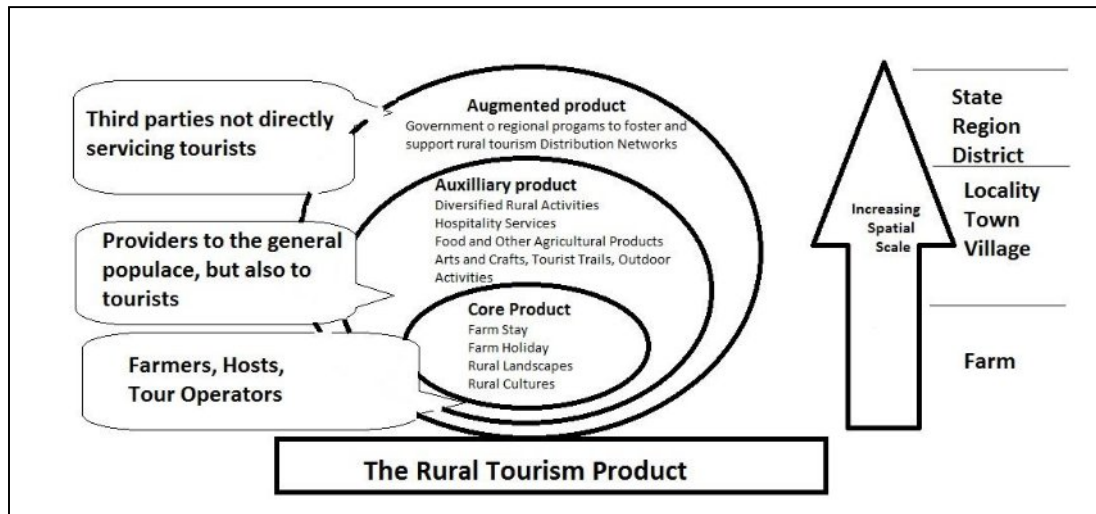


Figure 1: Defining the rural tourism industry
Source: Ian Knowd (2001)

New Zealand

According to New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries rural tourism product includes farmstays, country stays, rural self catering units, camp/caravan sites including backpacker accommodation, adventure, and ecotourism (Knowd, 2001).

Canada

Canada offers a rich plethora of rural tourism product including natural areas, wildlife, flora, village attributes, diverse cultural heritage etc. Also, these regions receive good flow of tourists (i.e. more than half of the total tourist visits) due to variety of experiences offered by rural tourism (Beshiri, 2005).

In majority of developed nations rural tourism has the following attributes in common:-

1. Multi-dimensional nature of tourism product.
2. Agricultural origin & farm house concept, supported basically to supplement the farmers income.
3. Peripheral Non or pro-agricultural association such as culture, craft, art, outdoor activities supported by the local people and Tourism entrepreneurs in form of hotels, restaurants etc.
4. Support the local community & local economy.
5. Quality of product given importance.
6. Open employment as well as entrepreneurship opportunities to the locals.
7. The local resources should be utilized, but in a sustainable way.
8. Government support given in form of subsidies and loan facilities.

Developing Nations

In developing nations, the key tourism places are present in rural areas such as national parks & sanctuaries, mountains, lakes, rivers, cultural sites etc. Thus, tourism is before

now a key attribute of the rural economy in these specific sites (Holland, Dixey, & Burian, 2003). Also, tourism has assisted several developing countries like China, Brazil, Argentina, India etc to move away from reliance on agriculture and manufacturing (Tooman, 1997; Wang et al., 2013) and brought benefits like Forex earnings, employment and revenue (OECD 1994; Sharpley, R. and Sharpley, J. 1997; Sharpley 2002). Rural tourism in developing nations has come into picture owing to agricultural restructuring; increase income & employment in less developed rural areas; remove poverty; protect culture and environment (as cited in Wang et al., 2013).

India

In India, the scheme of rural tourism was launched in 2002-03 (under the 10th Five year Plan), not merely keeping in mind the economic objectives but also, the social, cultural & ecological aspects. This scheme emphasized entrepreneurship and active community participation in development and policy-making of rural tourism. Rural India has a rich tradition of art, craft and culture. Rural Tourism is therefore, seen as a major opportunity for this endeavour and the Government of India has given priority to tourism in this plan as it has great latent potential, particularly in countryside areas, to create jobs and to guarantee 'sustainable livelihood.' Till January 2012, rural tourism projects at 183 sites and 52 rural commissioned sites have been sanctioned in India. In India, 74% of the populace lives in 7 million villages, so the scope of rural tourism is enormous. It can serve as a venue for improving the socio-economic conditions of the villages and provide solution to problems like falling income levels & lesser job opportunities. And also lead to growing interest of the local population in their own culture & heritage for which tourists would come from other places (Katoch, 2014).

China

China, like India too is one of the largest agrarian economies of the world. And it has also been suffering from issues like depopulation, agricultural structures, decline services, environment degradation etc. Rural tourism is a good option to deal with such issues (Wang, Cheng, Zhong, MU, Dhruba, & REN, 2013). This concept was first introduced in 1998 (Wang, Cheng, Zhong, MU, Dhruba, & REN, 2013), though the concept varies greatly in china as well (Yao & Su, 2006). But the core of the concept focuses on rural life; open spaces; agricultural landscape, life and customs and lead to sustainable development of rural areas (Fig. 2).

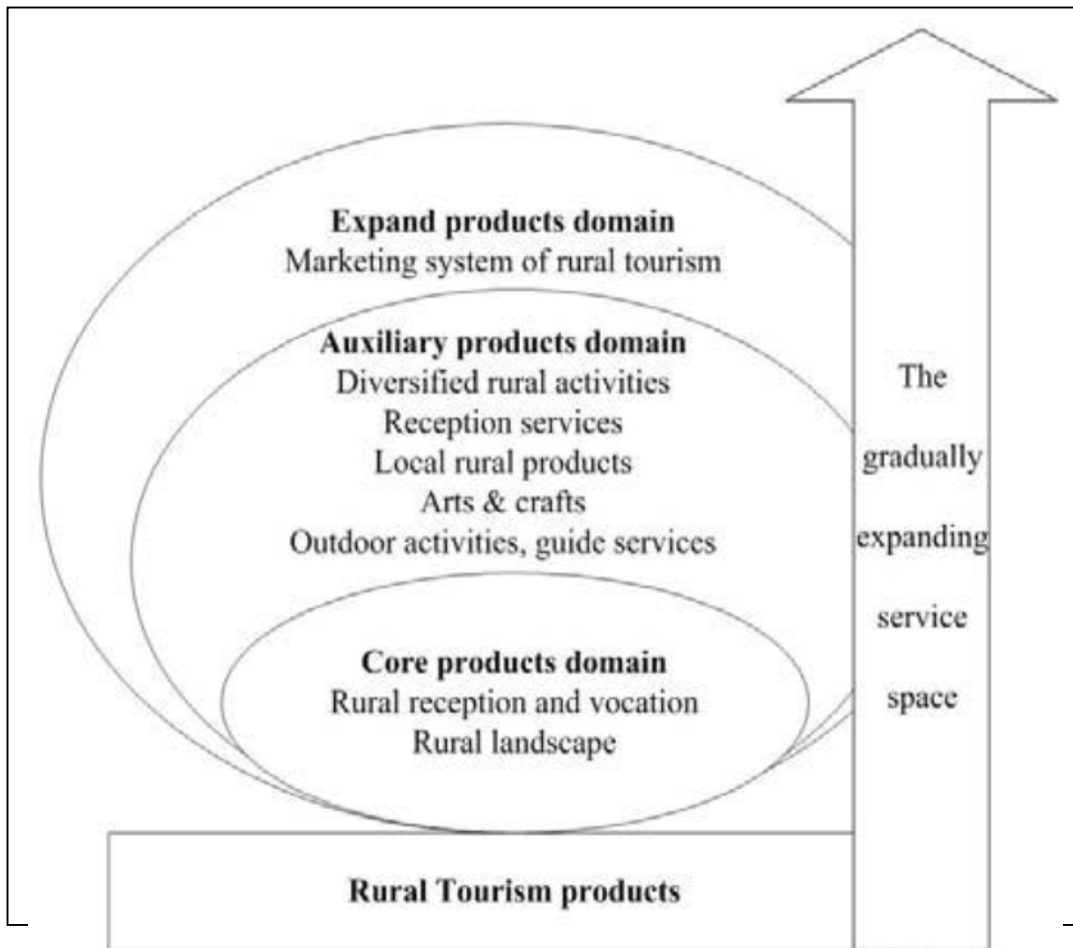


Fig. 1. System model of rural tourism products (Wang, Cheng, Zhong, MU, Dhruba, & REN, 2013).

Some countries of Latin America

There is great diversity and perplexity in rural tourism, but surely the core of it is the rural environment. In Brazil, this trend emerged due to two reasons: firstly is to add additional source of income to the rural workers and secondly relates to involvement of non-productive properties which are historical, patriarchal or architectural in value (Beni, 2000). In Uruguay, this concept emerged in 1996. In Argentina, this concept emerged phenomenally through the Argentinean program for rural tourism. In Chile, though farmers are present, but predominantly the small holders such as craftsman & rural workers are present & government too gives incentive for diversifying the rural economy. In Columbia, rural tourism includes the tourism activity attributed to natural landscape, beauty and as cultural and work substitutes (Santos, Souza-Fuertes, & Ribeiro, 2014).

In developing countries, the role of developing rural tourism is on diversifying the agrarian economy, developing alternative form of income for rural masses and

obviously to preserve natural & cultural aspects of rural economy. According to United States institute of peace special report 2009, tourism industry in developing countries can promote peace & stability by providing jobs, generating income, diversifying economy, guarding ecology and promoting cross-cultural awareness (Honey & Gilpin, 2009). The rural tourism in developing nations has been developed more specifically to improve the socio-economic condition present in the rural areas and at the same time to protect the complex cultural aspect, which is present in colossal form (Okech, Haghiri, & George, 2012). Here, the importance is not given to the lavish nature of rural tourism product which is an important ingredient in developed nations. And emphasis is given to present a platform to tourist to experience the life in villages. The other key emphasis to develop tourism in rural areas in developing countries is to develop the basic infrastructure, pour in money in the local economy, which benefits the local community and provides the platform for local craftsman and artisans in villages.

Least Developed Countries

The poor or least developed countries have recognized tourism as a tool for removing poverty, promotion of economic growth and development. Out of the global 49 least developed countries, 30 LDC's have selected tourism as an important sector for growth and development. And the reason for this has been that tourist arrivals in LDCs have tripled between 1998 and 2008, with an annual growth rate of 13% and increase in revenue from USD 1 Billion to 5.3 billion. Tourism is the primary service export in LDCs representing 33% of LDC exports and 65% of exports for Island LDCs. (Weinz & Servoz, 2011). Tourism provides great prospects to world economy & represents 6% to 7% of the world's employment & US\$1.1 Trillion a year in export earnings. That's why LDCs look towards Tourism as a priority development sector due to its ability of job creation, decreasing poverty, human development, ecological sustainability and prospects for all inclusive growth (Promoting tourism for sustainable development and poverty reduction).

The rural tourism is a viable and sustainable development option for the local community. It helps in poverty alleviation, by providing employment options to local people in tourism enterprises, local small & community based enterprises. All this contributes positively & negatively, though the emphasis is more to develop positive symbiotic relationship by removing poverty and enhancing livelihood opportunities. The various characteristics of tourism which make it relevant for the lower income countries and its masses are such as its rural product has great asset value (biological & cultural diversity), tourism jobs requiring less skills giving options to rural community, traditional sectors like agriculture, handicraft gets benefitted and linking opportunity to producers with consumers, who get direct value to their inputs. The primary two fold motive to develop rural tourism in LDC's is to increase the size of tourism sector as a performing sector in rural areas as well as to increase the number of benefits to the rural poor community (UNWTO, 2010).

4. Limitations

The research paper has been prepared by critically reviewing the various research paper, articles, websites and public policy documents of various countries with regard to rural tourism. Here, the effort is to see the rural tourism that is practically occurring in the nations though brief theoretical background of the concept has been given. Also, the major limitations in the research study have been:

- Concept of rurality, which differs from one country to another. For example, it may be 5000 people in Austria, 100/km² inhabitants in Scotland, 400/km² in Canada or in case of India where 75% of people should be dependent on agriculture and area not recognized as municipality, corporation, cantonment Board or notified town area committee is considered as a rural area (Census of India).
- The nature of rural tourism product varies from one nation to another. For example, in European countries we see agritourism as a prominent type of rural tourism on the other hand, it may be wilderness & nature or tribal culture in majority of countries in Latin America or African countries or it may be handicrafts in case of some Asian countries.
- The concept of rural tourism according to Bramwell, lane, Grolleau, OECD are central to development of rural concept, but they have not been discussed in detail, to give a full representation to other forms of rural tourism prevalent.
- Online websites and documents have been greatly referred of large number of countries, owing to their easily availability.

The representation of rural tourism of various countries is an effort to present myriad forms of rural tourism, then to present a pure perfect form of the concept.

5. Conclusion

The rural tourism in focuses on sustainability and to develop and conserve the rural areas by developing tourism on a wider more holistic, regional analysis which has regard for local community, its culture or enterprise; minimize negative impacts (economic, sociocultural and ecological); local participation in plan making & decision making process; keep check on visitor carrying capacities; employ selective marketing strategy; encourage local businesses; maintain quality of tourism product & enhance customer satisfaction; support agriculture & rural economy and should have long term goals (Lane, 2005). About, 75% of the world poor live in rural areas (Holland, Dixey, & Burian, 2003). The power of tourism can be used to pull regions in decline. And to provide employment, income and capital flows to materially assist rural development.

But rural tourism also has many challenges associated with it. The quality of tourism product, infrastructure, accessibility, skilled manpower, the involvement & support of local people, interest of investors too affect the rural destination. The challenges may further become complex owing to political and institutional hurdles especially in developing and less developed nations (Holland, Dixey, & Burian, 2003).

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