

PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM IN KENYA AND ROMANIA

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Abstract:

This paper identifies the available tourist attraction facilities within the Luanda rural region in Western Kenya and in Romania. This is to address how the locals can participate directly in the entrepreneurship either by providing accommodation and other attractions to either local or international tourists. This focus study in Luanda Division of Vihiga District tries to find out the best way of re-imagining of rural areas features and activities to make them tourist attractive, and to relate rural tourism with social cultural and economic elements of rural areas. The area is not well imaged, commodified and packaged to tap the rural tourism potential of the area. In the final analysis, the identification of character as being significant for place is of critical importance for rural areas and the notion of rurality.

Key words: rural tourism, Kenya, Romania, international tourism

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism related activities have been widely regarded as key-tools for rural development, specially in those countries – as Romania and all East European countries – where rural space and production is still a major part of whole economic structure, trying by this way to revitalize declining areas and ensure them possibilities of achieving a sustainable future. At this purpose, rural tourism must be considered like a complex plurality of multi-faced activities, contributing both to growth of other activities in rural areas and to improvement of life quality for local inhabitants, all this as part of an effective rural development integrated system.

With downturns in rural economies over the last three decades, it is perhaps understandable that governments have given a great deal of attention to the economic benefits of tourism, particularly for rural areas attempting to keep pace and adapt to the vigorous globalized economy. As Telfer (2002) suggested, growing numbers of city-dwellers are getting away from it all in the countryside. One of the advantages of rural tourism is that it is based on local initiatives, local management, has local spin-offs, is rooted in local scenery and it taps into local culture. In theory, the emphasis on the local can help to generate regional development. According to Sharpley and Sharpley (1997), rural tourism is increasingly being used for socio-economic regeneration and diversification. While the definition of rural varies in different countries, Sharpley and Sharpley (1997: 20) further describe rural as all areas 'both land and water, that lie beyond towns and cities which, in national and regional contexts, may be described as major urban centres'. For tourism to be described as rural tourism then it should mirror the characteristics that signify a rural area including small settlements, low population densities, agrarian-based economies and traditional societies. Lane (1994) details the difficulty in attempting to create a definition of rural tourism as not all tourism in rural areas is strictly rural. Rural tourism extends beyond farm-based tourism to include:

Special-interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and in some areas, ethnic tourism. (Lane, 1994:9)

Against this background, it is at this point that useful reference may be made to the experience in Kenya on the ground that an understanding of entrepreneurial opportunities of rural tourism development issues in a different cultural and institutional context can add new perspective on common concerns. The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Tourism and Kenya

Tourist Board are working round the clock to develop the Western Kenya tourism circuit in order to make it an international and domestic tourist destination. A greater part of Western Kenya is made up of rural areas, considering this, it means that most of the touristic activities and features that this region can offer are based in the rural areas within Western Kenya.

This paper is focusing on Luanda Division of Vihiga District to find out the best way of re-imagining of rural areas features and activities to make them tourist attractive, and to relate rural tourism with social cultural and economic elements of rural areas. Luanda division is within Vihiga district in Western Province of Kenya and covers a total area of 98.6 sq km. It is bordered by Kisumu district to the South, Siaya district to the North West and Emuhaya division to the East. The total population size is approximately thirteen thousand with a density of approximately 1035 persons per square kilometer. The population comprises a large number of youths between ages 10 and 24 years as opposed to the older generation. The total annual rainfall received is 1004mm. The soil drainage is good therefore the instance of water logging is not prevalent.

Statistics have shown that approximately 60% of residents in Luanda division are living below the poverty line. The ironical part of it is that this area is well endowed with natural resources which have been majorly used for economic activities such as agriculture and trade. This however, has not helped in reducing the poverty levels in this area and hence, another economic activity should be developed especially tourism in order to improve the well being of the area. There should be ways and strategies put in place to assist residents of Luanda tap all benefits accrued to these natural resources through rural area tourism. In view of the Kenyan tourism policy, the study focused on the following areas:

- Rural dwellers' capacity to support and respond to changes induced by tourism
- Cultural considerations in planning rural tourism
- Initiatives that encourage the development of any form of tourism in the region

FACTORS PREDICTING RURAL RESIDENTS' SUPPORT OF TOURISM

An extensive array of research has been conducted on resident attitudes toward tourism. Recent research has been conducted targeting communities worldwide, including those in Europe. While earlier work focused on the large-scale, or macro, side of resident attitudes, more recent research has targeted the micro side of resident attitude research. These recent studies have targeted specific communities and have explored the various elements and characteristics within those communities that predict resident attitudes about the presence of the tourism industry (McGehee and Andereck, 2004).

Differences in attitudes have also been examined according to degree of tourism development, level of an individual's involvement in the tourism industry, maturity of destination, type of tourism development, specific to one major event, and as compared to tourists' perceptions. As a step in trying to explain resident attitudes toward tourism, several studies have investigated the relationship between an individual's characteristic, such as demographics, personal benefits from tourism, community attachment, and attitudes toward tourism development. The majority of studies have shown residents who are dependent on the tourism industry or perceive a greater level of economic gain tend to have a more positive perception of tourism economic impact than other residents (Decio and Baloglu 2002; Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996; Jurowski, Uysal and Williams 1997; Lankford and Howard 1994; Liu, Sheldon, and Var 1987; McGehee and Andereck 2004; Sirakaya, Teye and Sönmez 2002).

Another variable that has been investigated in some studies is community attachment, often measured as length of residence and/ or growing up in a community. Some investigators have found evidence that attachment is negatively related to tourism attitudes but this relationship is not yet conclusive, given that others have found the opposite. Harvey et al., (1995) addressed the role of gender as a factor in residents' perceptions of tourism development. Other research has found that men and women do not benefit equally as a result of tourism development in their communities.

While tourism may provide employment for young persons and women, men of the community may perceive that tourism provides them few viable, respectable and thus acceptable opportunities for economic livelihood. Why is further exploration of gender issues or research on women and tourism important? A variety of reasons exist including a continuing gender-based salary gap, rapid changes in family life and rural lifestyles that may push women into poverty, domestic problems, or into double-duty with work and family responsibilities. Other problems associated with tourism development, such as crime, drugs, and prostitution, may affect women and men differently. Understanding how tourism development is perceived by all rural residents is important for planners and leaders alike as they struggle to balance quality of life issues with building a strong economy.

RURAL IMAGING

Research on authentic and inauthentic tourist experience and the manner in which images of attraction, culture and destinations are used in advertising and promotion has been well presented in the tourism literature. Both the nature of the destination image and manner in which it is created are of utmost importance because the appeal of tourist attraction arises largely from the image conjured up, partly from direct or related experience and partly from external sources and influence. Mental images are the basis for the evaluation and selection of an individual's choice of destination. Undoubtedly, there are many sources of the images that people hold for place and product. Although rural areas have long served to attract visitors through their inherent appeal, it is only in recent years that regions have explicitly sought to develop, image and promote themselves more attractive to tourists and investors and employees. Rural imaging processes are characterized by some or all of the following:

- Development of critical mass of visitor attractions and facilities;
- The hosting of events and festivals;
- Development of rural tourism strategies and policies of organization with new or renewed regional tourism organizations and how they relate to development of regional marketing and promotional campaigns; and
- The development of leisure and cultural service and projects to support the regional marketing and tourism effort.

The principle aims of imaging strategies are to attract tourism expenditure, generate employment in tourism and related industries, foster positive images for potential investors and local inhabitants and provide an environment which will attract and retain the interest of professionals who constitute the core work force in the new services industries. The identification of character as being significant for place promotion is of critical importance for rural areas and notion of rurality. Places are increasingly being packaged around a source of real or imagined cultural traditions and representations often focusing on a particular interpretation of the enterprise history of a place. Tourism may therefore reinforce those aspects of rurality and, hence, identify those which have become commodified through the process of place marketing.

LUANDA CASE STUDY

This study was exploratory in nature reviewed district development plans to assess the strategies put in place for the development agenda in the division. The primary data source of participatory approach to determine the concerns earlier outlined was necessary. In order to get nearer to lasting development results or sustainability, many agree that a participatory approach has to be taken (Mikkelsen, 1995). The units of analysis chosen include Luanda and Kima shopping centers and Emabungo village (Bunyore hill). These acted as the representation sample of Luanda division. Workshops and participatory exercises were conducted with 50 local residents in each area. The groups quickly and efficiently provided in-depth, qualitative information. The respondents were chosen from different socio-economic groups to ensure a wide range of representativity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Most respondents (80%) were between 20 and 50 years old, and no respondents over 70 years. In terms of gender (60% were women and 40% men). The gender distribution of the respondents reflects the socio-cultural structure in which there is a tendency for male domination in the socio-economic and political life of the community but clearly this is not the case here. This is the more reason why gender studies should be done frequently to determine the imbalances in terms of development initiatives in any given area. While 80% of the respondents had a very low income, 15% had a moderate level of income and 5% had a relatively high -income level. Moreover, 60% of the respondents stated that their family incomes were just enough to survive while 30% of the respondent considered their family incomes to be enough for a fair standard of living. A large majority (95%) had been living in the area since they were children. This may indicate that respondents were generally long time members of the local community.

The strong sense of belonging to Luanda division among respondents and the answers given to place of birth seem to support the above statement. A very small percentage of the respondents (0.5%) were illiterate. Some, 55% had a primary education, and only 8% had a university education. Clearly, most respondents were not well educated in a formal sense, which could limit community participation in tourism developments. From the interviews and participatory exercises it was clearly noted that they were 3 basic attractions identified namely; Bunyore (Emabungo hills) Eswalwa hill and Luanda market. Bunyore (Emabungo) hills comprise of great boulder rocks that makes it look scenic and attractive. The hill is also a source of many streams and small rivers and people live and even farm here. Luanda market is strategically located along the busy Kisumu - Busia highway. The people who normally visit the area are from Kisumu and Siaya districts. Groceries range from local traditional food items to manufactured foodstuffs. Rural tourism demand is accessed through checking on the number of tourist facilities that are available in the area (Ogola, 2005). From the facilities around there are a total of 37 bed spaces available mostly visited by stranded travelers thus showing that the area need to be marketed more.

According to the district development plan (2002 -2008) there are six hotels in Vihiga district out of which only four hotels are marked as the tourist class hotels and none of these are found in Luanda division indicating low demand of tourism. The area has businesses which are wholesale (18), catering (25) garage (1), petty business (281) and hard labour business (40). The Luanda area lacks travel and tour services as there is no agency to coordinate the tourist activities in the area which is another indicator that tourism is on the lower side of economic development. The mission and vision of the sector of rural development, the major focus is put on the promotion of food security, agro-industrial development, trade, water supply, rural employment and sustainable utilization of the natural resources. This clearly indicates that most rural development activities are only linked to agriculture development. In Kenya, tourism has not been incorporated in the development agenda for rural areas. It is only seen as a way of conserving forests and planners have forgotten to incorporate it as multiplier effect of agricultural trade and industry that are found in these areas. The only way of reimagining the Luanda division rural area to be very competitive tourism destination is by incorporating agriculture and a forestation to change the image of the attraction. Agro-forestry farming needs to be incorporated to bring out the aspect of rurality.

RURAL TOURISM IN ROMANIA

Ever since the fall of the Ceausescu regime, numerous commentators as well as visitors to Romania have drawn attention to the significant tourist potential which this country ought to have. With mountains, forests, a sea coast, and historic towns, together with a climate which should attract visitors in both summer and winter, Romania ought to be as inspiring for visitors as Austria or Switzerland. Yet the numbers of foreign tourists continues to be pitifully low, once again failing

this year compared with last. Romania's tourist industry performed better under Ceausescu, with charter flights to serve the mountains and Black Sea coast from Western European countries, most of which ceased in the mid 1990s. While a fall in the number of visitors immediately after 1989 was to be expected as many citizens of former Eastern Bloc countries inevitably chose to exercise their new-found freedom to travel to Western Europe, this should have been a short term development, and with an imaginative tourism strategy, Romania could have re-established its position in traditional markets as well as expanding into new ones.

Romania is, undoubtedly, a close place to the travelers and tourists who, among other things, want to spend their holiday in the middle of the intact nature. Consequently, the number of the tourists coming from the central European countries is continually growing. Many of them want to enjoy a holiday in an authentic peasant household. The **rural tourism** is for the people living in the countryside the only possibility to earn extra money. Alongside the development, within the local communities, of numerous individual accommodation structures, more and more local, regional and national organizations are developing concomitantly in the peasant households, with the purpose of promoting the tourist offer of different areas.

Moreover, the offer of active holidays has increased, too. More and more people on holiday come to Romania for excursions, trekking, hiking, horse riding, bicycle riding trips, mountain, cycling, off-road routes canoeing and kayak, rafting, paragliding, cave and mine visiting routes and many others. The organizers, often small, flexible and specialized firms, who offer active holidays, are becoming more diverse and more numerous in the market.

An effective tourism strategy would recognize that Romania has no hope of attracting foreign visitors in significant numbers if tourist facilities continue to charge at least Western European prices for services which in many cases have barely improved since communism. At present, the resorts seem to survive on Romanian tourists who prefer to stay in their own country or have become used to doing so. But this market too is diminishing as more and more Romanians are refusing to put up with such poor quality in relation to price and are heading for Greece, Turkey and other countries. The easing of departure restrictions for Romanian citizens leaving the country to visit the Schengen area has given a further incentive to holiday abroad. With EU accession, the bureaucratic impediments to foreign travel for Romanians will further diminish.

There has been a significant increase in recent years in both the quality and quantity of **rural accommodation** thanks to individual investors and SAPARD funding. Activities of organisations such as ANTREC are assisting rural suppliers reach the market. Organisations such as ADEPT and the Ecotourism Association are helping rural communities appreciate what tourism means and how they can benefit from it. The formation of more local cooperatives of rural tourism products – attractions, accommodation, activities and retailers – are needed to focus visitor attention on particular areas of the country.

More non accommodation product development is required in order to improve the range of visitor attractions and activities on offer. In particular opportunities exist for the environmentally sustainable expansion of visitor activities in the protected areas. These can have a significant beneficial impact on local community suppliers in or around the protected areas.

Better advance publicity of traditional rural events is needed to facilitate visitor planning. It is recommended that national parks and nature reserves prepare sustainable tourism development plans following the Retezat model and seek funding for identified visitor facilities.

It is also recommended that the NTO give priority public relations and promotional assistance to the various rural associations as the range of products and activities they foster represents some of the most important core values of Romania's brand image.

The proposed network of NTO regional development officers will assist individual rural suppliers with development advice in a broader regional and national context. They will also facilitate the establishment of local promotional consortia. At the same time they will facilitate the collection of event, attraction and activity data through the local TIC network for inclusion in the national tourism database and relevant promotional activity.

CONCLUSION

The government has done very little to boost rural tourism in this division or in Kenya as a whole justified by lack of tourism offices in various provinces. Most rural areas have been seen as production base agricultural raw materials and extractive units of mined materials. Declining economic activity, restructuring of the agricultural sector, dwindling rural industrialization and out-migration of higher educated youth, has led to the adoption, in many western nations, of tourism as an alternative development strategy for the economic and social regeneration of rural areas (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Dernoï 1991; Hannigan, 1994a; Pompl and Lavery, 1993; Wickens, 1999; Williams and Shaw, 1991). Therefore most of the rural areas have always pushed their development agenda putting their hopes and interest on the above-mentioned sectors of the economy.

This is justified by the 60% level of absolute poverty in the Luanda division, simply because the community has used natural resource in agriculture and therefore cannot alleviate them from poverty. Tourism industry depends on other sectors of the economy for its development. The attraction and activities in the division gives or makes the area have a great potential of tourism. The potential in this area is not well imaged, commodified and pack aged to tap the rural tourism potential of the area. The only way of encouraging rural area development is to encourage rural tourism. For instance Bunyore hill famously known as Emabungo (which means jungle) can be reimaged by doing afforestation on the non-residential side. In so doing, the image of jungle as the name suggests can then be used to market it as mass attraction. This is in line with the project proposals of development plans 2002-2008.

To facilitate the development of tourism in Luanda a provision of good roads networks to facilitate tourists' traffic and other physical infrastructure to stimulate development of tourist facilities should be considered. As the government is the prime provider of the above mentioned services, then process of imaging Luanda area for rural tourism will depend on the input of government in physical infrastructures. A large proportion of problems experienced by entrepreneurial ventures center around management-related issues, such as inappropriate organizational structure, reluctance to delegate, absence of operational controls and predominance of informal decision-making. For organizations to progress beyond survival requires not only possession of management skills and leadership to include more defined human resource skills, planning and goal setting, financial management and the ability to manage people effectively. Tourism provides many opportunities for small entrepreneurs to contribute to the provision of tourism experiences for financial gain. These opportunities occur in both the formal and informal sectors although, in reality, the distinction between the two may be blurred (Timothy and Wall, 1997).

Romania has numerous villages and attractive countryside offering excellent opportunities for rural tourism. The knowledge of the Romanian products through the rural tourism represents a main international factor for promotion of the Romanian economy and for the development of the national market. In this context, the development of the national tourist brand represents a priority, taking into account its effect upon the attraction of foreign investments but also upon the extension of the internal tourism, thus having a positive effect on the economy.

Within this general frame guidelines, and due to its natural landscape and cultural heritage, Romania owns a great potential in order to develop rural tourism activities, so becoming a first importance destination in South-Eastern Europe for such particular visitors.

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