

Cultural Heritage in Rural Areas: Added Value for Agro-Tourism Development

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Abstract : Tourism development in rural areas calls for a discussion of strategies that would attract more tourists. Several scholars argue that rural areas may become more attractive to tourists by leveraging their cultural heritage. The present paper explores the development of sustainable heritage tourism practices in transitional societies of the Western Balkans, specifically targeting Montenegrin rural areas. It addresses the sustainable tourism as a shift in business paradigm, enhancing the centrality of the host community, fostering the encounters with local culture, customs and heritage and minimizing the environmental and social impact. Disseminating part of the results of the interdisciplinary KATUN project, the paper explores the diversification of economic activities related to the cultural heritage of katuns (temporary settlements in Montenegrin mountainous regions where the agricultural households stay with livestock during the summer season) through sustainable agro-tourism. It addresses the role of heritage tourism in creating more dynamic economy of under-developed mountain areas, new employment opportunities, sources of income for the local community and more balanced regional development, all based on the principle of sustainability. Based on the substantial field research (including interviews with over 50 households and tourists, as well as the number of stakeholders such as relevant Ministries, business communities and media representatives), the paper analyses the strategies employed in raising the awareness and katun-sensitivity of both national and international tourists and stimulating their interest in sustainable agriculture, rural tourism and cultural heritage of Montenegrin mountain regions. Studying the phenomena of responsible tourism and tourists' consumerist consciousness in Montenegro through development of katuns should allow evaluating stages of sustainability and cultural heritage awareness, closely intertwined with the EU integration processes in the country. Offering deeper insight at the relationship between rural tourism, sustainable agriculture and cultural heritage, the paper aims to understand if cultural heritage of the area is valuable for agro-tourism development and in which context.

Keywords : heritage tourism, sustainable tourism, added value, Montenegro

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