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A REVIEW ON THE EFFECT OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM ACTIVITIES TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Cities have become centres where the economic development exists who get massive immigration with the increasing speed of production, industrialization and technological development. As an expected result, the reduction of employment in rural areas and the increased migration cause that these areas lose their importance and the reduction of agricultural activities there. So that volunteer tourism within the themes such as eco tourism, rural tourism, agro tourism has begun to reveal new tourism activities together. In this sense, new touristic activities within the scope of volunteer tourism which has been preferred by young travellers in recent years, has become more common in ecological and rural areas. Volunteers can both recognise a new culture and participate in agricultural and cultural activities that belong to that locality by means of volunteer tourism. This participation leads to cultural interaction and the recognition of that culture naturally by another culture. As volunteer tourism activities take place in these rural areas, the attraction to these areas are starting to increase thus economic impact gains a positive momentum. Rural areas which are very important for the agriculture will be examined within the scope of the volunteer tourism activities which have impact on rural development in this study in order to emphasize that rural areas have an important role in the economy of the country.

In this context, the data which will be obtained from the interviews of 10 participants who participated in the project "A Solution Development by Rural Tourism Approach for Employment Problem in Agriculture: The Model of İnönü "of the ESOGU RURAL TOURISM CAMP during 1 month were analysed through focus group discussion and descriptive analysis .

Keywords: Volunteering, Rural Development, Tourism

Introduction

Cities, sea side areas, luxury accommodations, standard sightseeing tours...etc. they all provide traditional tourism methods for having lots of fun, forgetting the daily life challenges. All tourists are in action in the frame of contemporary tourism. On the contrary to traditional tourism methods many tourists, especially young tourists start to take part in "volunteer tourism or voluntourism", i.e. they are all in action and experience with feelings. The recent growth volunteer tourism or voluntourism focus on meaningful holiday experiences (Bakker, M., & Lamoureux, K. M, 2008) another form of 'continuing education' and 'lifelong learning' (Vrasti, W. , 2012), interactions during the process (N.G. McGehee and K. Andrecek, 2008)wellbeing more than development (Butcher, J., & Smith, P., 2015).

In this sense, new touristic activities within the scope of volunteer tourism which has been preferred by young travellers in recent years, has become more common in ecological and rural areas. While the experiences gained through the traditional tourism makes no sense in interaction of the individual, volunteer tourism creates meaningful interactions especially when it occurs in natural, local areas in the scope of rural tourism, eco tourism and agro tourism (Wearing & Neil, 2000). The points we raise in this paper that is the volunteer tourism activities which have impacts on rural development.

In this context, we obtained the data from the interviews of 10 participants who participated in the project "A Solution Development by Rural Tourism Approach for Employment Problem in Agriculture: The Model of İnönü" under the title of ESOGU RURAL TOURISM CAMP. The active process of the project including volunteer activities took 1 month (18 June 2018 - 17 July 2018) in İnönü, Eskisehir, Turkey. We had chance to get the feedback of the impacts on rural development through the volunteer tourism during the project period. The volunteer tourism activities in rural areas were very rich. Project participants consisted of students and researches from Aleksandras Stulginskis University, Lithuania.

More and more studies focus on volunteer tourism as alternative tourism; however it has very strong relation with rural tourism. It is not possible to tackle completely problems or developing the rural tourism totally but volunteer tourism can be a good solution in order some impacts to be emerged by means of volunteers and the activities that they participate in for the problems in rural and developing the rural tourism. Generally environmental issues and agricultural issues are focused on but non-agricultural issues such as tourism activities must be centred too. So the volunteer tourism approaches must be adapted enough to develop the rural and rural tourism together with its process. Because each rural environment has different alternatives and volunteer tourism activities must support rural development. Adapted volunteer tourism activities in rural provide further development to the region and offer a way by promoting alternative experiences that are different from mass tourism (T. Young, 2008).

Volunteer Tourism Activities in Rural Tourism

Depending on the projects, there have been extensive motivational activities such as safari tours, language courses, and adventure activities during participation in volunteer tourism. According to the research of the State of the Volunteer Travel Industry 2009, it is pointed out that the most popular volunteer activities which are different from in rural tourism and rates of them as below:

- Skills Based 2%
- Humanitarian 6%
- Healthcare 13%
- Conservation 17%
- Community
- Development 18%
- Building 22%
- Teaching 22%

(State of the Volunteer Travel Industry, 2009)

It is indicated that tourist product diversifications and alternative activities together with experiences of volunteers influence the development possibilities in rural areas (Udovč A. & Perpar A., 2007). As it was mentioned, rural areas which are very important for the agriculture are examined within the scope of the volunteer tourism activities which have impact on rural development in this study in order to emphasize that rural areas have an important role in the economy of the country. The volunteer tourism activities of the "ESOGU tourism camp" led the İnönü district to be a touristic

product more than being an agricultural environment as rural. The programme of volunteer tourism activities contains three stages empowering the rural development.

The first stage of volunteer tourism activities involves adaptation to the rural environment and theoretical trainings.

The second and third stages of volunteer tourism activities relate to experiencing and involve volunteer works on farms, exploring the region, sightseeing tours.

The volunteer tourism activities which have impacts on rural development in the scope of the mentioned project are summarized in Table 1:

Table1: Stages on Programme of Volunteer Tourism Activities

Stage	Steps	Purpose
ADAPTATION THEORETICAL TRAININGS	Local District Tour	Encourage the volunteers to fast adaptation
	Presentation of the Region and Country	Promoting the region and country to volunteers
	The institute of agricultural research visit and training	Bring together characteristics of region, cultures and “volunteer tourism or voluntourism”
	Flora and Fauna training	Encourage dialogue between different cultures
	Cross Culture Dialogues	
	Rural Dialogues	
EXPLORING	Rural Yoga	Economical impact to the city and region
	Traditional Ceremonies of The Region	Experiencing the real and local culture
	Free Times (Shopping, discovering the city)	Interaction by meeting the locals
	Tours : City Tour ; Eco Village Tour, Rural Tour (Rural Areas of the city where the project occurs)	Promoting the touristic product of rural tourism in the scope of volunteer tourism Increasing the motivation of volunteer tourism
EXPERIENCE	Volunteer Farm Activities: Lavender Garden; Bean Farm; Tobacco Farm; Soilless Strawberry Farm; Cherry Farms; Cultivating the Farms	Practices to reach the main aim of the project Focusing on effective practices in the concept of volunteer tourism Volunteer Tourists explore what is effective for rural tourism in the scope of volunteer tourism and how they are doing this

Source: authors' field observations.

Methodology

This research is written as an output of a Project whose title is "A Solution Development by Rural Tourism Approach for Employment Problem in Agriculture: The Model of İnönü". The qualitative research method was used in this research. The focus group interview was conducted with ten participants included in the project process. Answers are obtained from questions asked about volunteering. The obtained data were analyzed by descriptive analysis.

Collecting Data: The focus group interviews are qualitative data collection techniques and mostly used to reveal information on the surface. In this sense, the knowledge, experience, emotion, perception, thoughts and attitudes of the participants are important in the focus group interviews in accordance with the general nature of the qualitative researches (Çokluk, Yılmaz&Oğuz, 2011). Information on the participants who involved in the project process is given in the following table.

Table 2: Information on Participants

Participants(P)	Age	Gender	Experience
P1	37	Female	Fifth
P2	27	Female	First
P3	21	Male	First
P4	20	Female	First
P5	22	Male	Third
P6	22	Female	First
P7	22	Female	Second
P8	21	Male	First
P9	22	Female	First
P10	22	Female	First

According to the information in the table above; 70% of the interviewed group is female, and 30 is male. The average age of the participants is 23.6 and only %70 of them has their first experience as a volunteer.

Analyzing Data: The data obtained in the study were analyzed using descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis is a kind of qualitative data analysis which is formed by summarizing and interpreting the data obtained by various data collection techniques according to the themes. The researcher can directly cite the conclusions of those who have seen or observed in this kind of analysis in order to reflect the judgments of those who are realistic and striking (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2003).

Findings

When the data obtained from the study were analyzed descriptively, findings were found in the direction of the research; the significance of volunteering for the participants, the impact of volunteering activities on the local people and rural development, and the contribution of tourism, which is a sector supporting rural development.

The Significance of Volunteering

At the moment of the data obtained from the participants during the interviews are analyzed, the common points about volunteering are as follows;

Volunteering;

- Getting new experiences,
- Getting to know different cultures,

- Making suggestions about important and specific issues
- Personal improvement
- Helping the others.

According to Participant 3(P3) *“Volunteering means for me is that I have different experiences every day, we have so many activities and facilities to see different places, we learn too many things”*, P6 said *“ When I decide to be a volunteer in this project I didn’t know anything about Turkey, but during the project I learned that the cultures and differences can’t change anything but spreading love, I love here, and I can see that sharing what you have it makes you human, it helps me to believe in myself”*. During the project the participants has different activities and trainees every day, in the process of trainees the participants took courses about tourism, rural development and farming, and they had sessions for discussion. Regarding P8 *“ As a volunteer, when you involved in a project, you have to discuss the important points about the project aims”*.

How to Effect Rural Development and Local People

One of the aims of the project is that empowering the development in rural areas with tourism and increasing the welfare of local people. During the collecting data the participants discussed about the topics. The common points of analyzing are as below;

- Promoting the area
- Taking attention of investments
- Helping the majority to take action for the development
- Creating the strategy for tourism and other sectors
- Increasing the familiarity beyond the borders
- Cross culture
- Adaptation for different culture
- Creating new employment fields

For example P7 said about the topics which is *“ Our dorm is located in the rural area, we help the farmers and we talked with them and we communicate with local. It helps to get know a culture both ways”*. According to P1 *“The projects may help the municipality to think making investment on tourism to creat new employment places, and this makes the place more visible and promoting”*.

Tourism

Tourism is one of the basic elements forming the project. When the opinions about tourism how effect to rural development are examined, the results are as follows;

- Tourism is a leading sector which is suitable to creat new touristic products
- Tourism can help the rural development with alternative tourism types
- In the sector, promotion and advertisement is very important
- Rural tourism can be a solution for development
- Tourism Types must be replicate in the rural area
- This type of project can be useful for promoting
- Accommodation system should shown the tradition of the area

According to P5 *“ During the project we saw different historical and touristic places, Eskişehir has a lot of alternative tourism types. But main problem is that there is a lack of advertisement, even local people doesn’t know the variety of the city”*. P10 said *“ Alternative tourism types such as agro tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, education tourism etc. can be a solution because people request new experiences. Municipalities and national agencies must be effective for investments”*.

Results and Discussion

As a result; if tourism sector and volunteers work within cooperation, can bring effective results. As seen the analyzes , volunteer tourism contributes to the region in terms of communicating with the local people in rural areas, getting to know cultures, helping and working with locals, and also introducing the regions through individuals. Intercultural interaction can strengthen communication among young people living in the region.

While the development of the regions is achieved through the projects, a tourism movement is taking place at the same time. The development of the tourism zone, the emergence of new business opportunities, and the development of infrastructure work. It contributes to the national economy. Participation in tourism in rural areas with a wide range of products and dynamics is taking place at local, national and international levels.

The municipalities of these areas for the promotion of tourism, associations, universities must work together to take steps towards the realization of turkey 2023 tourism strategy. The contribution of the strategies and promotional activities to be determined should not be ignored. Volunteer tourism and projects should be supported to achieve rural development.

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