

REPORT ON THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

5 – Sustainable rural tourism & 6 – Confronting poverty in rural areas

Participants in two thematic working groups No. 5 (Sustainable rural tourism) and No. 6 (Confronting poverty in rural areas) have decided for joint discussion, since sustainable rural tourism is strongly connected to poverty in rural areas.

PROBLEMS:

- Rural tourism can help reducing poverty, but strong financial as well as knowledge support is needed. In poor rural areas there is not enough money to invest in tourism even if there are many possibilities for co-financing.
- Legislation and bureaucracy is mostly the biggest problem for sustainable rural tourism.
- Not enough competent interlocutors on local (grass root) level, they often recognise problems and do not see (or search) solutions. Top level sees some problems, but not in depth. Connection between them is needed.
- Young people are leaving rural areas. It makes them even poorer, old traditional knowledge is disappearing, which can be potential for rural tourism. Because of lack of young people with fresh ideas, will, motive and energy to work in tourism, there is not much chance for its development (“old” people usually do not start something new).
- Undeveloped infrastructure.
- Lack of trust between local inhabitants, developers and local authorities, national authorities, also because of lack of information and no results from promises.

SOLUTIONS

- The most important is education, diversification, and communication in rural areas, to reduce poverty.
- Modernisation of local infrastructure is important.
- Even more important are local organization, local partnerships (also public-private).
- Networking and cooperation is necessary and pre-condition for local partnerships and development.
- Gaining trust between partners: local inhabitants, local authorities and local business (investors).
- Business sector is usually the one with strong vision; they invest in promising projects, it is needed to attract those investors.
- On the basis of one success story (project) local politicians can be included in further development (“survival trick”: give them small praise).
- Promotion and dissemination of good projects! (Success stories)
- Creation of clusters, cooperation (not only in tourism, but in general for development of rural economy).
- Responsibility for success and mistakes as well as for sustainability of project (business, tourism, promotion,...) must be taken (from local initiatives). Ideas and money are not enough.
- Sustainability can only work, if all sectors involved find common goal, common contact point. Therefore communication is a must in all directions (vertically and horizontally).
- Connection between grass root level and top level for any development is needed; there can be strong role of civil society as well as role of national rural networks.
- National rural networks should put more emphasis on education of local inhabitants (to recognize opportunities in rural tourism) as well as local authorities and administration (to be more flexible and cooperative).

EXPERIENCES FROM PARTICIPANTS

Turkey: Problems in rural areas in South – east region. Very poor area, more than 30% of people do not own any land (almost like feudalism), young people are moving to suburbs of big cities, working low quality jobs to earn money and bring it back in their area. Those people do not have enough knowledge to move further, to get better jobs, they represent burden for urban areas as well. Very strong depopulation is presented in rural areas. There is also cultural and ethnical problem, which inhibits development and causes poverty.

Bosnia: They had similar cultural and ethnical problem as Turkey, but they are trying to solve it by using two different strategies, two different approaches and through support of communication between two sides (building bridges). They are quite successful. They also use a lot of training and promotion. It takes time and patience. Sustainability can only work, if all involved find common goal. Communication is a must!

General: There are some connections between local inhabitants, tourism providers, and local businesses. Sometimes local initiatives with their events present touristy offer, are interesting, bring tourists in the area.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Rural tourism is one of possibilities to fight against poverty, but not the only one.
- Tourism in rural areas should be basis (dough) and not addition (cherry on the cake). It is economical section with greatest multiplicative effect, because it is complex activity. You do not need land for that and it is worth to develop it.
- Not everywhere tourism is possible.
- Every area is interesting and has something to offer. There are no "boring" areas.
- Not all problems can be solved.
- Not all projects are success, but from one success story a lot can be done with upgrading it.
- Be proactive, do not wait for others, if you do not do any move, no one will for you.
- Never give up.

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