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**EU rural policy and tourism -
Farm tourism reinvestigated**

by
Per Åke Nilsson^a



ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has shown a structure different from rural primary activities, like agriculture, forestry and fishery: it is expanding, labour intensive, and maintains the service base in the region. Farm tourism is an example of rural tourism. It has ideological roots in the romanticism of nature and social tourism. It has played a greater role in the conceptualisation of tourism industry than its character signifies, and the reason for that seems to be a set of exogenous and endogenous development motors, driving farm tourism: diversification of agriculture, gender issues, and promotion of farming interest groups.

This paper looks for the EU impact on the driving forces of farm tourism, distinguishing it from rural tourism.

Keywords: rural / farm tourism, romanticism, perception, diversification, gender, farming interest groups.



INTRODUCTION

EU is in general an urban area where the vast majority of people in average reside on just a fifth of the total land area. The urbanisation varies and in the Nordic countries the population is to a high degree concentrated to capital regions. Greater Stockholm has had an average increase with one percentage unit of the total population of Sweden every decade since 1970 (from 23 % to 27 %). The three big city regions Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö have together, during the same time period, had a development from 52 % of the total population of Sweden in 1980 to 57 % in 2006.

These concentration tendencies have their roots in a more and more industrialised and effective agriculture with less need for labour force. Fewer farmers feed more people and this has accelerated since EU started in 1957. On the other hand, the founding fathers feared a shortage of food after the war and subsidised the food producing sector and protected it from the outer world by high custom tariffs on imported food. After a while, this became a burden since the effectiveness of the agricultural sector resulted soon in a surplus of food within the union. To change this has been a headache for EU ever since the costs for the subsidies have dominated the common budget.

The tendencies to develop mega-polis regions, resulting in an unequal distribution of service together with a heavily subsidised agriculture in the depopulated areas have turned out to be a delicate problem for the Union. The Commission has worked along two different action lines: on one side a program for a more polycentric Europe (ESDP), starting in 1999 and a new policy for reducing the subsidy costs to the agricultural sector (CAP) starting in 1992. Two ways to reduce the costs were on the agenda: reduction of the subsidies or reduction of the farm production. The enlargements of the union in 1982, 1994 and 2005 put the finger on the unmanageable agriculture problem and there was a common insight (but not a preparedness) of the necessity for a solution of that problem.

This paper examines the impact of EU policies for rural areas on rural policy in Scandinavia with regard to rural tourism, especially farm tourism. The point of departure is the relationship between national policy on rural policy and EU policy and its impact on rural tourism in general and on farm tourism in special. The paper starts with a discussion on what is rural, rural tourism and farm tourism.

Rural

In order to sort out what rural tourism and farm tourism stand for, it is necessary, however, to discuss what rural is. The countryside is often regarded as an incarnation of calm and reflection, with a trait of backwardness and a lifestyle that, from an urban perspective, seems different as it has developed from an obsolete form of society once dominated by peasants. The



countryside of today is occupied by an urban lifestyle but the old idealised picture of the farmer is, however, still in the minds of urbanites. In short, there is a dichotomy between *rural reality* - how an industrialised farm of today actually works – and *virtual rurality* – how people perceive, or want to perceive, life in the countryside (Nilsson & Sørensen 2003). Sharpley & Sharpley (1997) state that many rural tourists are more motivated to visit the countryside by the desire to experience rural environment than to participate in specific activities. The authors conclude that “..actual or perceived ‘rurality’ as the modern antithesis to modern, urban life is an important element of the rural tourism experience” (p. 65).

Apparently ambiguous, the term rural is used in many ways like how the roles, played by nature and culture, constitute ingredients in the landscape. Landscape is a geographic whole, including topography, vegetation, human impact, and economic use but boundaries between what is perceived as culture and what is perceived as nature become vague and relatively un-useful for definitions. Widlund finds (1994) it impossible to disregard human impact on the landscape, resulting in a confusing mix which makes the landscape multi-faceted and inspiring. Macnaghten & Urry (1998) describe maps and landscapes as something that reduces “..the complex multi-sensual experience to visually encoded features and then organize and synthesise these into a meaningful whole” (p 120).

In a recreational discourse on landscape including commercial tourism, the wholeness of the landscape, however, has to be segmented, but not separated, through perspectives of different needs required by tourism. For tourists, the mosaic of impressions, created by the landscape, is important. Inherent subjectivity and intentional aspects from those, who visit the landscape, puts focus on these different segments. Cloke (1992) concludes that in order to meet these different recreation demands, it is a minimal request to know what is packed, offered and sold as rural tourism and why the landscape is consumed as an attractive recreational product.

A more official view of what is a rural landscape is given by the *European Landscape Convention* which states that a landscape is an area “...as perceived by people...[and with a character as]... a result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors... A landscape policy consists of measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes... Landscape management means measures taken to harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes” (Council of Europe 2000, Article 1 and 6). In the ambiguity of how we perceive landscape and thereby the need for the *Landscape Convention*, lies a dichotomy between the romantic and non-romantic view on nature. The non-romantic, or maybe realistic, view is based upon human nature as dualistic. The evil flesh, the body, is seen as a prison for the divine soul as a reflection of God. The real nature is looked upon in the same way: wild nature is evil (flesh) and cultivated nature is good (soul). Domestic animals are good, wild animals are evil and so on. The romantic view on nature, developed



during the 18th century, has the reverse view on nature and finds civilization evil and God and divinity is found in untouched nature (Lovejoy 1936). The romantic view on nature is also the base for the ecological movement with pillars like biodiversity and sustainable development (Atkinson 1991). Wiklund (1995) explains this dichotomy a bit deeper by citing Braudel (1949) that the Mediterranean man is farmer by necessity but wants to live an urban life. This citation is, by Wiklund, reversed for Nordic people who are urban by necessity but want to live a rural life (p 130). During leisure and holidays, the Nordic man prefers nature and when dwelling in the city, the park is more important than the square.

All this can be seen as a theoretical background to what landscape, countryside, and rural is about. When people are asked in empirical studies what the countryside means for them and what they appreciate in the rural context, they often give a top-ten list without matching one preference against another. Often the preferences are contradictory or meaningless without deeper analysis of consequences (Macnaghten & Urry 1998, Caspersen & Olafsson 2006). Instead of imposing a set of *a priori* derived items to respond to, local residents should respond to what have been “generated during initial exploratory research undertaken in their community” (Boyne 2003, p. 27). Such elaborated investigations, based on complex models, have been made where people have to justify their perceptions against alternatives or match them against possible revenues or losses from changes (Lindberg et al. 2001). To conclude, landscape is, despite its wholeness, either a tool for agriculture and forestry to produce commodities for living and sale or a virtual rurality, the importance of which lies in the eyes of the observer.

Rural Tourism

Since a considerable part of EU rural reality concerns depopulation, people’s perception of the landscape is affected by these migrations. Migrated people perceive the landscape as virtual rurality, sometimes based on a conviction that it still has the same shape as they abandoned it. Those who remain in their countryside homestead, often have the same perception kept in their memory despite their more or less urban lifestyle. For rural tourism, this gives a possibility to offer something special, contrasting to the everywhere present urban lifestyle. To fit in with these perceptions of virtual rurality it is necessary to present rural tourism as small in scale, based on local traditions and culture and of course managed by local people, even if some of them may be in-migrants (Cloke & Little 1997). By formulating this image of tourism (e.g. by Lane 1994) and presenting it to foreigners (tourists), local people can create an identity for themselves separating them from urban culture even if the urban culture today is predominant also in rural areas (Nilsson 2002).

Even though rural tourism is based on the conception of preservation of traditions and rural lifestyle, commodification of the rural landscape is inherent as a basic condition. Rural areas can be bought and sold as concepts, rural lifestyle can be “colonized”, and expressions for local,



rural tradition can be commodified and marketed. That commodification has to start with the segmentation of the landscape, sometimes creating conflicts with local residents (Braunerhielm 2006). The image is often connected to sustainability as more or less synonymous to rural tourism. Sharpley (2003) questions this sustainability by referring to the outbreak of mouth and claw disease in 2001 in UK, an incident that resulted in an almost break down of rural tourism in UK. There is an irony in the fact that rural lifestyle can be jeopardized by threats inherent in the lifestyle itself and it should be a signal to rural tourism when marketing rural lifestyle as sustainable.

Since the landscape is a mix with floating boundaries of rural and urban, real and virtual, nature and culture, the product packaging work is really an undertaking. The small scale form of rural tourism contradicts a too effective packaging aiming at a sort of mass tourism. These two interpretations of how to cope with rural tourism have polarized the tourism industry, either as an aspect of as a *cultural* product or as an industry. The cultural aspect has *control* over the product as the essential in order to save the authenticity character of it. It can be the role of perceived authenticity as a determinant of tourist satisfaction (Chabra et al. 2003), the relationship between heritage management and tourism development, (Aas et al. 2005), heritage as an anchor for rural tourism (Hall et al. 2003), or (ab)use of Viking heritage for national identification (Lyngnes & Sletvold 2007) . Most of these cultural definitions are underpinned by theories derived from cultural academic disciplines like anthropology, ethnology, history or sociology. Key words are traditions, control, authenticity, ethnicity, and seriousness. The industry aspect apprehend rural tourism just as a special part of common tourism. That aspect has the *local* as the platform for the further definitions, like tourism as an industry (Leiper 1993;Page & Getz 1997; Leiper 2008), a commodification of the rurality (Cloke 1992) or a definition of rural tourism (Lane 1994). These definitions often take their point of departure in economic theory or practice. Key words are handicraft, monopoly, small scale, local roots, diffusion (of the culture)

The floating boundaries can, however, make it possible to offer a landscape or countryside placed on a continuum of overlapping social spaces with its own logic, own institutions and network of actors. The countryside is attractive by various cultural flavour given to it by people living in various stages in that continuum and the attractiveness of the countryside lies in what pure urban life cannot give (Mormont 1990; Nilsson 1996; Oppermann 1996; Sharpley & Sharpley 1997; Page & Getz 1997).

The experience economy has during the new century given new dimensions to the commodification of the countryside. Pine & Gilmore (1999) define this economy with the key-words: *entertainment, education, escapism, and estheticism* (p. 30). The main traits of what is regarded rural should be exploited as bases for experience. These traits are supposed to be pristine nature, culture heritage, and traditional rural production. Openness to backstage



acquaintance is the key issue to offer tourists this special experience and to underpin the impact of the experience, story-telling is the instrument *par preference* (Bach Jensen & Manniche 2007). In several areas, efforts have been taken by different forms of industries, public bodies, and organizations representing social capital to create a base to transform local identities and traditions to a more professional branding of the experiences connected to the whole region.

It is important in this context to mention that rural tourism often has other measures for growth and success than other forms of entrepreneurship. Quality of life is often more important for rural entrepreneurs than growth and economy (Karlsson & Lönnbring 2003). Komppula (2003) argues for a model of a continuum to place rural tourism entrepreneurs within, ranging from commercial success to lifestyle and quality of life.

To conclude, there are many components in rural tourism. There seems to be two basic issues which probably are connected to each other: the migration from rural areas to urban areas and the longing for rural areas in the urban areas. This longing forms the base for the rural tourism but it also underpins the identification process for those remaining in the rural environment and tourism is the catalyst for this identification. The main problem for rural tourism is the packaging of the product, how to commodify rurality. There are obviously two ways: to commodify it with the aspect of culture heritage in focus or with the aspect of rural development in focus. These two aspects may not be contrary but are often perceived to be impossible to unite. The typical form for rural entrepreneurship, the life-style focus, can both be the way to unite the two perspectives but also a barrier for both by inherent difficulties to be profitable.

Farm Tourism

Farm tourism is a sub-set of rural tourism as it is described above. An early start of the phenomenon was in Austria where it expanded strongly after World War II, when people wanted to escape the bombed towns by looking for accommodation in the countryside. The farmers noticed that this could turn into a business and started to offer accommodation for recreation and tourists (Embacher 1994; Oppermann 1996; Urlaub auf dem Bauernhof 1997; Nilsson 2002). In Italy, a reason for the emergence of farm based tourism was that it turned out to work as a counter action against urbanisation (Bergström et al. 1997).

Farm tourism, like most forms of rural tourism, has its base in a dichotomy between what is a rural reality and a virtual rurality, but it deepens that dichotomy by putting emphasis on the relation between host and guest. The interaction between the private life of the host and the experiences of the guest was essential in the original form of farm tourism, which emanated from the concept of social tourism. Social tourism became popular during the 1920s and 1930s (Oppermann 1996; Nilsson 1999) and was launched as the 'true' and non-commercial form of



tourism, promising friendship between people regardless of nationality. Reisinger (1994) sums up the ideas behind social tourism in what is called the *contact hypothesis*. That hypothesis stipulates that contact between different cultures will pave the way for understanding and thereby diminish the risk of prejudices, conflicts and tensions (Allport 1954).

Tucker (2003) examines this interaction and finds both pros and cons related to the phenomenon. Although attractive and a source for deeper information, the relation can give unwanted feelings of restriction and obligations. The idea behind the relationship is the tourists strive for peeping into the “backstage” (MacCannell 1976) and a study of Saami tourism in Sweden (Eriksson & Sjövik 2002) shows that the every-minute-a-day interaction between host and guests, sharing work and kitchen table, is extremely exhausting for the entrepreneur. There is a need for a backstage behind the exposed backstage as a frontstage.

Self-catering has reduced the frequency of this interaction especially in Scandinavia where from the 1960s it has been the most popular form. Interrelations with the hosts occur of course, but these meetings are voluntarily conducted (Nilsson 1999).

As a result of the depopulation, lots of houses in the countryside were abandoned and farmers were financially supported in order to repair these houses in order to make them useful for rural tourism. Also habited farm houses had to be repaired in order to meet the higher demands of urban tourists so they could accommodate tourists. In France *Gîtes ruraux* were initiated by the government in order to stop the depopulation but also to promote rural tourism. Support was given farmers to renovate unused buildings for primarily Bed & Breakfast (Moström 1999). In Israel, farm tourism has become a natural outspring of the state inspired *moshav* activity, a parallel to *kibbutz* but with individual ownership of land (Fleischer & Pizam 1997).

Is farm tourism special?

There is indeed something special about the rural context. Despite the urban colonisation of rural lifestyle, still the rural lifestyle is regarded to exist and perceived as attractive. Not many people want to share countryside life permanently but the longing for a short stay “out there” is obvious.

Karlsson (2003) refers to different motivation theories in his critical study of tourists’ choice of destinations. Among inner motivation theories like escape from over-stimulated life situations (Ragheb & Griffith 1982) or looking for joy, an *autotelisk* experience (Csikszentmihály 1996), the common trait is the longing away from the traditional, and since that is urban life for most people, rural life can be seen as the alternative.

With this background, it is easy to see that rural tourism has a special advantage and some entrepreneurs use this advantage in order to earn money on tourists. Since most of them have



business, not growth, as a lifestyle, resources for marketing are scarce and personal development through education does not fit in with the reality most entrepreneurs live in.

Farm tourism is a small business within rural tourism. According to an EU-report (LEADER 1997), farm tourism comprises 2% of the total turnover from rural tourism (including wilderness activities) and only 0.3% of the turnover from the agriculture. Put in relation to all bed-nights in Sweden, including visits to relatives and friends and summer houses, farm tourism is estimated to make up only three bed-nights in a 100,000 for all of Sweden, which is a negligible figure from the standpoint of the economy in total, but has a significance for the image of agriculture at both the national and local level. The figures for today (2008) are marginally better.

But farm tourism can be seen as the incarnation of the fulfilling of the romantic dream of staying in the countryside. A brochure from 1990s in Denmark exemplifies this:

To hear the cock crow. Eat fresh laid morning eggs. Notice the thrilling feeling of a rough calf tongue. The strolling for hours looking for a four-leaf clover. The smell of fresh harvested corn and the serene bellowing from the stable breaking the tranquillity. The boy-dream of sitting on the tractor, high above the others. The warm, apple red cheeks of children, resting safely on the pillow after a good day, filled up with impressions. That's countryside life. The life kids love! (1997 Landsforeningen for Landboturisme)

It is obvious that this is not formulated by a single farmer in a personal leaflet promoting his special farm. On the contrary, this can be read all over Europe in different brochures with small or no changes of sentences (Nilsson 2002).

That depends upon the fact that the material is centrally produced and distributed by central channels. These central channels are parts of the national organisations for farmers, the farmers' unions. No other form of rural tourism has these muscles if the winter sport industry is left aside. In these brochures, verified by interviews with single farmers, it is stated that it is important to promote the lifestyle of the farmers and an understanding of the food creation processes (Nilsson 2002).

Gender has always played an important role in farm tourism, much more than in other forms of rural tourism. That is obviously a result of the labour division within a farm with strict borders between genders. Farm tourism is normally run by the farm wife (Friedmanns 1980; Gasson 1980; Deroi 1991). While tourism is often adding to the burdens of farm wives, tourism also increases their power within the family. A study in England showed that farm wives use catering as an argument to improve the kitchen (Bouquet & Winter 1987) and Girauld (1999) puts gender rather than diversification and agricultural crisis in focus as the motor for development of farm tourism. Women's fight for a professional status within the farm and their will to create



some new activities of which they could be responsible are strong driving forces of farm tourism, he argues, something Bourdieu (1998) neglects and instead refers to the inequality between men and women in ranked positions, which leads to a reproduction of this ranking. The complexity of the motives is expressed by Oldrup (1999) in a study of off-farm employed women in Denmark. They all witness of the difference between their expectations and self-understanding and the compromises they have to make but an off-farm experience gives them obviously the same position on the farm as engagement in farm tourism does. Burr (1999) states from Scotland that younger farmer's wives, given the opportunities to pursue a career in off-farm employment are likely to opt for this pattern of work. In a study of farm tourism management in Minnesota with a gender perspective, Danes (1998) confirms the ideas that both farm tourism and off-farm work, rank the positions of the wives higher on the farm. Danes also confirms the idea that this can be a motor for starting farm tourism or leave farming for another life.

EU rural policy

In the shadow of World War II with a devastated Europe, the predecessors of EU decided on a policy, based on a rigid production oriented subsidy policy. When it was established in 1963 as the basis for EU's food and agriculture programmes, it had four principles:

- free movements for agricultural products within the union
- financial solidarity for the subsidies to the sector
- preference for own products within EU
- price regulation in order to secure farmers the same income as industry workers.

The result was mountains of beef, cereals and butter, unsalable on a world market and with no demand domestically. In 1992, EU agriculture spenditure represented around 60 % of the total EU budget. In 2005, this figure had decreased to 44 % and the forecast for 2013 was 32 %. (Newsletter on the Common Agriculture Policy 1977).

Facing the enlargement of EU by six new member-states, the Commission proposed a change in CAP from being production oriented to become demand oriented. The surplus was considered precarious and indefensible. A plan, delivered to the Commission by the former Minister of Agriculture in Netherlands, predicted an intolerable imbalance unless EU undertook to reduce cultivated land by at least 5 million hectares. The Plan also suggested that production methods should be reformed and modernised and that small farms should be increased in size. The aim of the Plan was to encourage nearly five million farmers to give up farming (Mansholt Plan 1970). Despite the intolerable facts, the criticism of the plan was fierce by national defenders of the current structure in their home countries (Stead 2007).



The Commission backed and almost nothing happened until the 1980 when a new and more comprehensive "rural" policy was decided. The main issue of that policy was a reduction of subsidies to agriculture instead of reducing the cultivated area as proposed in the Mansholt Plan but hopefully with the same result. In order to please national interests, tourism and other forms of commercial activities were presented as substitutes or complements to agriculture. New concepts were introduced, like *optimal use of local potential*. A balanced relation was strived to attain between traditional agriculture, other forms of rural activities and nature preservation interests. This balance was supposed to underpin the possibilities for the farmer to act more freely and successfully in his different roles as food producer, leader of rural development, user of nature resources and as a base for local service (Community action to promote rural tourism 1990).

In the CAP 1992, the Commission describes the role of a farm as many-fold in a society. It is an industrial complex with a lot of machinery which need maintenance and service. It is an economic unit with a turnover mostly over 100 000 € a year which requires bank service and book keeping support. It is a transportation node for cattle, milk and grain. Since the farm is place-bound, it has to be supported by local public service like school and medical treatment but also private service like petrol stations and stores. The place-bound situation will normally also make the farmer sort of a back-bone in local associations and thus important for local social capital. Since tourism also is place-bound, it could easily be one of the commercial activities recommended by the Commission. As a result of that, rural tourism in general and farm tourism in particularly, has been encouraged both by EU and by politicians within the member states (Common Agriculture Policy 1992).

Behind the reform of 1992, it is important to mention EU's relation to the Uruguay round of the GATT trade. The Commission had to pacify different members of the round who accused EU for protectionism. Later on, in 1999, it was agreed upon a split of CAP into two separate "pillars", one with focus on agriculture subsidies and the other on rural development. The changing situation of the 1990s for EU agriculture policy led to a proposal for a new reform. The new enlargement made it even more necessary to do something about the subsidies which were regarded as impossible to encompass the new member-states (Common Agriculture Policy explained 2004).

In the proposed new CAP reform from the Commission, the language had changed from subsidy driven production to consumer driven production. New concepts were introduced like environmental issues and animal welfare. It gave EU farmers freedom to produce more in accordance with what the market wants. The reform aimed at wealth creation and cohesion of EU but the proposal was sent back to the Commission with claims for revision (EG no. 1698/2005).

The Commission listened to the Parliament and in the Cap 2005, rural development was in focus with work for income equalization in the countryside but with consideration taken to



different condition for agriculture in different rural areas. Varying social and economic characters of agriculture in various locations because of different nature-based conditions had to be paid attention to. In a special paragraph, the Council coordinated the two problems – depopulation and food surplus – and stated that there is a need to follow up changes in rural areas with a possibility to support a diversification of agriculture by other types of activities and to develop other sectors which will make the countryside more attractive in order to encounter depopulation and social and economic deterioration (EG no. 1698/2005).

The enlargement 2005 increased the number of farmers from 7 mio. to 11 mio. The agricultural land area was increased by 30 % and the crop production by 10-20% (More unity and more diversity 2003). For most member-states, however, rural tourism already played a role as a countryside developer. In Hungary, it was a way to re-establish the declining villages, which had been the backbone of the countryside until a strong depopulation occurred in the 1970s (Balogh & Csaky 1991). In Romania, the fall of the Ceausescu's regime, which had enforced a programme to eliminate villages in the countryside, created a need to revitalise the countryside. Rural tourism played an important role in these activities (Szabo 1991). The cohesion is still, however, a main objective for the Commission and equally distributed possibilities for people to travel and it can be seen in a report from the European tourism industry, presented for the European Commission, where it is found that most residents in the new member-states prefer rural based accommodations and not hotels, since international travel for citizens in the new member states is costly relatively to their income and rural based accommodation are cheaper than hotels (European tourism industry in the enlarged Community 2007).

It is important to note that Cap is not the only EU incitement for rural tourism. National incentives for people in Sweden to leave agriculture and forestry sectors were common especially in the 1960s and the number of farms was reduced by 230 000 to 150 000 during the 1960s . In 1995, the same year as Sweden became member of EU, *Bo på Lantgård (Stay on farm)* was already established by support from among others the Ministry of Agriculture, the Farmers' Union and NUTEK (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth) and had 67 914 bed-nights with a turnover of 17,7 million SEK (LRF Manual 1996). The number of hosts in 1998 was about 300 (Nilsson 2002). Today, there are about 400 farms throughout Sweden, offering B&B, self catering, equestrian activities, fishing, motor-biking, countryside conferences (Staying on farm 2008).

Within EU, structural development of rural areas, including tourism, has been supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) with the purpose to manage impacts of transformation economies in marginal areas of the Union. This management is also the concern for Liaisons Entre Actions pour la Développement des Économies Rurales (LEADER) which started in 1990 and intend to promote an integrated approach to rural development, especially by Local Action Groups (LAG). Rural tourism has been a substantial ingredient of the activities promoted by LEADER programmes. Probably as a



result of their bottom-up perspectives, the form of tourism developed within the programmes has been small scale and linked to local traditions and endogenous entrepreneurs.

Based upon the decision made by the Council in 2005, a national program for the period 2007-13 was elaborated and this was accomplished by Denmark, Sweden and Finland in 2007. This fits unintentionally well with the development of world market prices on cereal during 2007 and 2008 which created a new situation for EU farmers. In July 2007, ministers of agriculture agreed upon a remove of former decisions on fallows. Subsidies for food export has fallen to almost zero. At a meeting November 19th, 2008, the ministers of agriculture considered various proposed changes, including cutting farm aid, scrapping rules on keeping land fallow and phasing out milk quotas. As with previous reforms, the measures are designed to free up farmers to respond to increasing demand and face new challenges such as climate change, water management, biodiversity and the biofuels boom (Farming rethink, Around Europe – News from member states 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism has become an important instrument for the EU Commission to solve two severe problems: the unequal distribution of service caused by the depopulation of the countryside and the bad-proportioned costs for agriculture surplus in the budget.

The depopulation problem has been in focus for ERDF and LEADER programmes and the objectives have been a more polycentric Union and a wish to encourage a bottom-up perspective for rural development. Rural tourism in general has played a significant role in this endeavour.

The surplus problem for the EU agriculture sector has been encountered in two ways: reduction of subsidies and reduction of production. For the farmer, there seems to be a mixture of expectations and roles. It may look ambiguous when the Commission states that the farmer is a "a rural entrepreneur" and at the same time expects him/her to abandon the farming partly or totally. Probably the Commission's intention is to strengthen those farmers who can survive by making them key factors in the development of their rural environment while those who leave the farming may be employed by the surviving farmers in the service sector they give the base for.

The role of the EU policy has been crucial for farm tourism in many respects. For the Commission, several factors have made farm tourism popular as an instrument in the process of rural development.

First, farm tourism had from start an ideological perspective by the connection to social



tourism, which is in line with the presentation of EU as a peace project. The contact hypothesis is in that context of vital importance and farm tourism delivers a situation where host and guest meet in a close relation, which gives a possibility to understand each other and feel affinity. Later on, the Commission coined the issue of cohesion within the Union and farm tourism is one component, though small, in that context.

Second, the Commission has tried in different ways to cope with the depopulation of certain regions of the Union, a depopulation which create costs for the whole society. Despite, or perhaps because of, the depopulation, urban people often has a longing for the countryside and tourism is one possible channel to canalise this longing and thereby contribute to the development of rural areas and counteract the depopulation. The interplay between the rural reality, represented by the farmer as a farm entrepreneur, and the virtual rurality, represented by the farmer as a tourist entrepreneur, creates the tension that underpins the nostalgic image of the countryside, making it as one important factor for its development.

Third, farmers own organisations saw the value of this development and were ready to help with the transition process. The farmers' own organisations backed up the process since it gave a good image for the "life in the countryside" and thereby supporting farming and farming interests in the political process. The marketing campaigns for farm tourism is much more professional than for other family based tourist companies.

Fourth, the gender situation within agriculture made it easier to introduce diversification since the tourism business became an interest for the wives. The often strict relation between male and female work on a farm made it is natural for the women to use their social talent. A family based farm needs two persons for management but not always for full time and the wife is often working in an urban context in part time. Tourism offers a possibility to do this work at home instead.

Fifth, farm tourism implies accommodation facilities and as a result of that, lots of abandoned buildings have been repaired and transformed to accommodation entities. This results in a better use of existent resources which otherwise would have been vanished.

This development clarifies that farm tourism has, however, never been an interest in itself. The main objective was the reduction of the budget for agriculture subsidies but since that is quite difficult to enforce due to national interests, the striving was disguised in different actions for rural development. Since farming caused the deficit, farmers became key players in this play. This is evident when considering the insignificant nature of farm tourism volume and profitability compared to the interest given it in the different editions of CAP. The reduction of agriculture spending has gone hand in hand with a promotion of the role of the farmers as development actors.

During the last decade, rural policy has been broadened and involves now more than tourism and rural entrepreneurship. The objective now is a "balanced and polycentric territorial



development” and is taken care of by the ESPON project (European programme under Structural Funds for applied research in the field of territorial development, www.espon.eu). The current situation with an increase in food products has even more changed the interest for farm tourism to other rural development forces. Farmers have not the same need for subsidies and the diversification policy is more or less abandoned. Other structural problems seem to strike the farmers instead. Some farmers gain and some loose and the result of the inevitable structural change is not possible to forecast. The devastating impact on the third world agriculture by the EU subsidies to its own agriculture is also an uncertain factor to count with.

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