

DECADES OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN HUNGARY

At the border of old and new rural tourism?

*Kovács Dezső PhD. honorary professor, Institute for Regional Studies, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences
kovacs951@gmail.com*

DOI: 10.15170/TVT.2020.05.04.06

Abstract

Rural tourism as a rural economic and social phenomenon, is increasingly sensitive to changes in the world and within the country. Its development and history can be connected to the great world economic crises and the political system change and policy changes within the country.

During the past thirty years rural tourism has flourished, declined, revived in new forms with new actors and attracted and is attracting new customers. A generational shift has taken place, and the main goal of the activities is not just to obtain additional income but to build an enterprise for profit. The former rural tourism host families no longer enjoy positive discrimination; the countryside has become a neutral investment territory. Behind these phenomena are new values and tastes and new interests and fashions.

Due to the COVID-19 world crisis, those places in the countryside where rural tourism supply is present are being revalorized. Although this study is based on a survey from 2012, the events since then show that it is time to reevaluate and reconsider everything that we learned and thought about rural tourism and rural hospitality in the past.

Keywords: countryside, rural tourism, generational shift, rural enterprises, rural policy

Absztrakt

A falusi turizmus, mint vidéki gazdasági és társadalmi jelenség, rendkívül érzékeny az országban és világban zajló változásokra. Fejlődése és története összekapcsolható a nagy világgazdasági válságokkal és a politikai rendszer-változásával és a belpolitikai fordulatokkal.

Az elmúlt 30 év során a falusi turizmus felvirágzott, visszaesett, új szereplőkkel, új formában életre kelt és új piacokat hódított és hódít. Generációváltás zajlott, ma már a fő irány nem a jövedelemkiegészítés, hanem haszonra törekvő vállalkozás építés. A hajdani falusi vendéglátó családok már egyre kevésbé részesülnek pozitív diszkriminációban, a vidék semleges vállalkozási célterületté vált. Emögött új érdekek, érték-és ízlésváltás, új divatok vannak.

A COVID 19 világválság felértékeli azokat a vidéki helyeket, ahol a falusi turizmus jelen van. Bár a tanulmány egy 2012-es felmérés alapján készült, az azt követő évek eseményeit követve elmondható, hogy eljött az ideje, hogy mindent újra értelmezzünk, amit eddig falusi turizmusról és vendéglátásról gondoltunk.

Kulcsszavak: vidék, falusi turizmus, generációváltás, vidéki vállalkozások, vidékpolitika

Introduction

Rural tourism is a world phenomenon from Europe to North and South America, from India, China to Australia and Africa. However, in each continent and country, rural tourism has its own characteristics. It is a kind of fingerprint of a given time period on rural issues. The common denominator of rural tourism in the urbanising world is that the traditional subsistence living based on agriculture is more and more difficult both in developing and developed countries. Families of rural communities have to find new income sources. The rural, agro, agri, farm, village tourism etc. are forms of searching new income through sale of rural attractions and amenities to tourists.

Rural tourism is a good example of how rural and agricultural families use their social network and tangible capital, accumulated by generations. Small communities are built on community and natural resources of their environment. They are able to cooperate with their friends, neighbours, relatives. Rural tourism also reflects the relationship of different governments to rural families to improve the liveability of the countryside and counterbalance the negative effects of ageing, outmigration and depopulation which are general symptoms of rural areas.

My study aims to present the characteristics of rural (village) tourism phenomenon in Hungary in the 20th and 21st centuries and focus on the changes after the 1990 political changes. Emergence of rural tourism in Hungary can be connected to the great economic crises. The first boom of rural tourism occurred in the thirties of the 20th century, during the world economic crisis. The second one occurred 60 years later at the beginning of the nineties, when the political changes in Hungary and CEE countries resulted in enormous crisis in the countryside. In its effect it was similar to the crisis of the thirties. The third turning point is also connected to the world economic crisis in 2008-2010, but in effect it was just the opposite to the previous two upswings. That crisis resulted in a downturn in the traditional rural tourism, but the second decade of the millennia shows new phenomena as well. This is the exploitation and investment in countryside, which represents a new approach, new actors and new customers. The former positive discrimination of the local population and local entrepreneurs disappears. The fourth worldwide crisis in 2020 caused by the COVID 19 pandemic re-valorized the remote rural places and it might bring similar positive effects on rural tourism as the mentioned first two crisis. The question is how long this new upswing and popularity would last?

This paper reflects a snapshot, a historical moment in rural tourism development in Hungary after the 2008-2010 severe economic crisis and a new political era after 2010 in which the former rules and regulations were re-defined and different tools for rural development were implemented.

1. Methods

Most of the rural tourism studies approach the theme mainly from the aspects of tourism product and analyse and compare different characteristics of it. My approach is based on the transformation and innovation of rural families towards tourism and hospitality services. All of this happened during and after an overall political and economic restructuring and transformation from the socialist planned economy and single-party system to market economy and multiparty system. Considering this social environment, the basic question was how rural families were able to start new, previously not learned and practiced activities, how they could develop themselves with the implementation of the new activities.

After the 2008-2010 economic crisis the question was for rural tourism: what has changed and what has remained more or less stable and what are the new signs in this phenomenon? I have applied different methods; a survey, interviews and focus group discussions with rural tourism hosts and participants' observations on meetings of the National Rural Tourism Association. Each of the seven regions and 10 counties from the 19 in Hungary were selected in the survey. All of the rural tourism hosts were selected who had email address and were members of the National Rural Tourism Association, altogether 684 rural tourism host families.

The survey had been sent to the hosts' addresses three times altogether. The county rural tourism organisations sent a supporting letter separately and encouraged their members to respond to my questionnaire. From the 684 email addresses I got back 299 surveys, of which 212 surveys were completed. The respondents arrived to the last page of the questionnaire although they may not have answered to all of the questions. There were 13 groups of questions, 95% of the respondents gave answers at least to 8 groups of questions. The survey could not reach those who did not have an email address (probably very few people, and those who were not members of the National Rural Tourism Organisation). The survey was closed down at the end of August 2012. As the sample was partly taken by representative selection, the data and results can be considered with reservations. Nevertheless, it has been and it is still the biggest field research database in the country since 2012.

The National Rural and Agritourism Association had 1,800 members in that year (by 2020 this figure diminished around 1100 hosts. The statistics of the Tourism Agency, based on self-declaration of the hosts indicate 3 times more hosts involved in this business) representing 56% of all the hosts in the country. In 2012 by the data of the Central Statistical Office there were 3,186 rural tourism hosts with 8,864 rooms and 22,977 bed capacity registered in the country. It means that the national average in rural tourism is 2.79 rooms and 7.21 beds per host. One guestroom has an average of 2.59 beds.

2. Historical background

The emergence of rural tourism in Hungary under the historical name 'village paying guest service' can be connected to the 20's and 30's of the 20th century. A so-called hospitality movement and organisation, the National Hosts' Association (Országos Magyar Vendégfogadók Szövetsége, OMVESZ, SÁGI E. 1934, KENÉZSNÉ 1996) was established to convince the urban middle class and civil servants to have their holidays not at the Adriatic seaside (which was detached from the country after World War I) but in the nice villages of the country. The tourists' spending on food and accommodation aimed to increase the income of the involved peasant families to improve their low living standard during the world economic crisis. Another task of the organisation was to get rural families prepared to have guests in their premises. This movement and the organisation were quite successful. Among the leaders were members of the aristocracy, the ruling elite, high rank officials. They were able to incorporate the local elite, priests, teachers, notaries into this movement to teach peasants how to refurbish their home and how to treat urban guests in their houses. It was a top down movement during the thirties with nationalistic, patriotic appeal (voices) due to Trianon treaty in 1920 when Hungary lost two thirds of its territory after World War I.

This movement and organisation ceased to exist after World War II. In the divided world after World War II the territory of Hungary became part of the Russian interest sphere and the single-party system and command-planned economy were introduced. The agriculture had been collectivised, the peasant production means, land, animals, machinery had to be given to local cooperatives therefore the former private initiatives halted. Private economy was pulled back to the so-called agricultural households and small artisans.

During the sixties and seventies under the Kádár regime however, tourism re-emerged in Hungary and due to the lack of accommodation capacity in hotels etc., travel agencies organised so called paying guest services in private homes, mainly in towns and at Lake Balaton, the main recreation area of the country. Therefore, some rural hospitality capacity emerged in villages as paying guest service. Hungary as the 'happiest barrack' of the socialist camp was the main meeting and family re-union place for West and East German families. During the seventies and eighties a significant mass tourism developed in the capital and in some historical towns and destinations of the country.

The second boost of rural tourism occurred at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties before and after the political changes. It was a kind of spontaneous reaction of some rural families to search new solutions for the rural unemployment crisis. The majority of the rural middle class after the 1990 political changes lost their local or urban workplaces. These rural citizens, mainly women had to find new income sources. To replace their lost income – if their household conditions and personal ambitions were appropriate – many rural families, the majority of them women, started a rural tourism venture.

Therefore, rural tourism at the beginning of the nineties in Hungary was the venture and innovation of rural women, who had to start some new economic activity. This female innovation was based on their existing resources, the family's decent house, a well-kept garden with fruits and vegetables, animals – mainly chicken, and pigs – in the households, orchard or vineyard with wine and some handicraft activities. The accumulation of the previous generations – house, barn, press house and some empty rooms in the house – served as a starting capital and used in tourism as production means and attraction as well (in those former socialist countries where the collectivisation did not wind up the peasant agriculture and estates (Serbia, Poland, Transylvania, Slovenia) the peasant families could establish agri or farm tourism on their estate). Furthermore, these women had their household knowledge – how to cook, keep the house tidy, how to contact unknown people etc. – and they also had extra free time because of the loss of their previous workplace.

Therefore, the rural tourism supply consisted of the amenities of the households, the knowledge and network capital of rural people, mainly rural women, the organisation and presentation of the attractions of their environment and the cultural and leisure programmes in villages and the towns nearby. These activities generated additional income, gaining back what was lost during the emergence of market economy, privatisation, compensation after collectivisation etc. Rural tourism was partly a spontaneous movement, a bottom up development, full of enthusiasm, hope and naivety. (FOTIADIS 2009)

3. The notion of rural (village) tourism

The concept of rural tourism has significantly changed during the past three decades in Hungary. It is well presented in the literature (SZABÓ 1992, 1996, CSIZMADIA 1993, CSORDÁS 1998, KISS 2001, KOVÁCS 1995, 2003, 2010, KULCSÁR–LAKNER 1995, KÓRODI 2006, DÁVID ET AL. 2007, KULCSÁR N 2013).

Basically there are two different approaches to rural tourism. The traditional or classical rural tourism notion (in Hungarian it is called village tourism) is when the guests live together with the host's family in their empty rooms of the house. The hosts maintain their main profession and the hospitality service represents an additional income for the family. The background of this activity is the family house, the hospitality knowledge of the family, the village community, traditions etc. and the natural environment around the house and village. The other approach is much broader, it is more of a collecting term: it considers different tourism forms in the countryside, the paying guest service, village campsites, village pensions, holiday houses, thermal spas, swimming pools, castle hotels, horse riding facilities, tennis courts, restaurants, Tourinform offices etc. In this concept anyone can be the subject of this activity.

During the past 25 years the concept of rural tourism has gradually changed and now it is closer to the second approach. This broader understanding is more of tourism in villages and the traditional form is only one variety of this broader concept. The essence of this tourism form is best described by the definition of Eurogites, a European umbrella organisation.

“Within the global Tourism Economy, the Rural Tourism is defined by the *valorisation through tourism of agrarian spaces, natural resources, cultural heritage, rural housing, local popular traditions and products*, through specially labelled *products* that reflect the regional identities and cover the needs of the consumer for *accommodation, gastronomy, leisure activities, animation, and other services*, with the objective of a *local sustainable development* and an adequate answer to the *needs of leisure of the modern society* within a new social solidarity between city and countryside (*EuroTer*)”. (https://images.slideplayer.com/19/5913390/slides/slide_6.jpg Klaus Ehrlich)

In this paper I would like to save myself from the definition trap therefore I would not quote the many different definitions which exist in the literature. Each of them is appropriate in their own context, but it is impossible to give a very definite definition for rural tourism, because it largely depends on national traditions, habits, regulations, history, and these differences are reflected back in the understanding, definition, regulation of rural tourism country by country.

4. Main results of the research

4.1. Social characteristics of the rural tourism phenomenon and hosts in Hungary

At the beginning of the nineties a lot of illusions was attached to rural tourism. One of the extreme opinions was that rural tourism would provide living for some hundred thousand rural families. In reality the figures show that after gradual development the peak figures were 7-8 thousand families involved in rural tourism by 2007-8. In 2012 however it was hardly more than 3 thousand and in 2018 it was only 2,336 registered families by the CSO.

By the latest agricultural census in 2010 there was no significant involvement among agricultural holders towards tourism. During that census 507,446 individual holdings were counted but there were only 40,513 holdings which pursued so called 'other economic activities' besides agriculture. Within this category under the title of 'hospitality', there were only 987 individual holdings (2.5%). This is 0.2% of the all individual holdings.

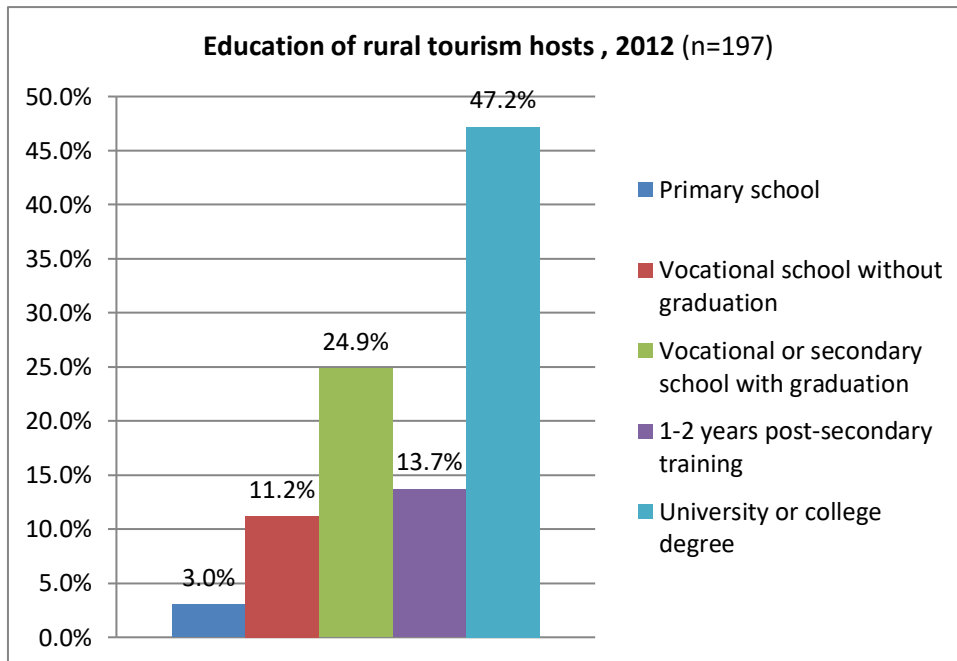
This figure shows that the emergence of rural tourism in the 90-ies did not come from the agricultural sector, but mainly from the rural household sector. In other European countries, like Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Norway and Sweden the main rural tourism holiday form was "Holiday on the Farm", referring to the diversifying attempts of farms in these countries and strongly connecting tourism and the agricultural sector to each other. In the nineties the political agenda for agriculture in Hungary was not to diversify but to establish family farming. Therefore, rural tourism is a complex phenomenon in Hungary and it cannot be described as diversification of the family farm in the initial phase. It was rather the extension of the household towards services of tourism and hospitality.

The service provision in the family space means constant openness and readiness to have and meet guests and it requires high standards which are hard to fulfil or suit. It requires special personal character, professional knowledge in hospitality and appropriate circumstances. These special micro-enterprises are very sensitive to different interventions, attempts of regulations and the steps of the competition.

The majority of the hosts, nine out of ten, are integrated into their local community, which means they were born in the given village or have lived there for a longer time. The distribution by gender shows that 2/3 of the hosts are women and 1/3 are men. It refers to one of the original mainsprings that this service aims to create income generating activity for the female members of the agricultural family.

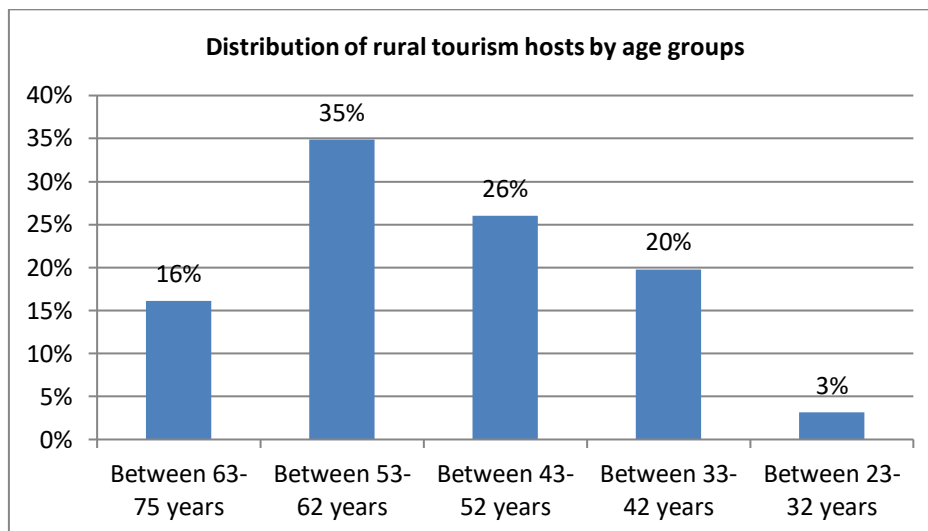
47% of the sample had university or college degree. 39% of them had graduate certificate from secondary schools. 11% had vocational school certificate and only 3% had primary school education. These figures also reflect indirectly the lack of workplaces of rural Hungary on the one hand, and show the complexity of rural tourism businesses which requires several skills and knowledge. In order to pursue this service well, it is not enough to cook well and have a few empty rooms. The involved persons should be familiar with the characteristics of tourism, hospitality and marketing, they should know the amenities and attractions of the area, the IT services, the world of the internet. In several cases the knowledge of a foreign language is also a necessary requirement.

Figure 1: Education of rural tourism hosts 2012



Source: Edited by the authors

Most of the hosts belong to the middle age or elderly by age group (Figure 2). Nevertheless, the age group of the thirties is gradually entering into rural tourism hosts as entrepreneur, counting with the EU subsidies and support.

Figure 2: Distribution of rural tourism hosts by age groups in 2012, in %

Source: Edited by the author

Table 1: The crosstab of age group of hosts at the launch of the service in 2012 (persons)

The launch of the rural tourism service	Age groups of rural tourism hosts (year)					Total
	63-75	53-62	43-52	33-42	23-32	
1985-94	4	9	6	0	0	19
1995-99	6	12	4	0	0	22
2000-04	12	15	10	4	0	41
2005-08	6	14	8	14	2	44
2009-12	2	15	17	20	4	58
Total	30	65	45	38	6	184

Source: Edited by the author

Behind these figures a peculiar generation change is observable among the hosts. The first generation who had been participating in this hospitality service from the beginning, after 15-25 years of services gradually steps out and retires from rural tourism. However, they cannot pass the service activities within their families for various reasons. Therefore, the continuation of the service occurs not within the experienced host families but through new families who enter into the rural tourism business.

There are two new groups entering rural tourism. One is a younger age group in their 30s and 40s and the other age group is in their 50s, before their retirement age. The younger age group considers rural tourism as a possible field of entrepreneurship. They build new guesthouses explicitly for guest accommodation and they rely on EU resources besides their own financial possibilities. The older generation dreams about their life after retirement and plan relaxed and smart activities in tourism. They also expect additional income from the hospitality service.

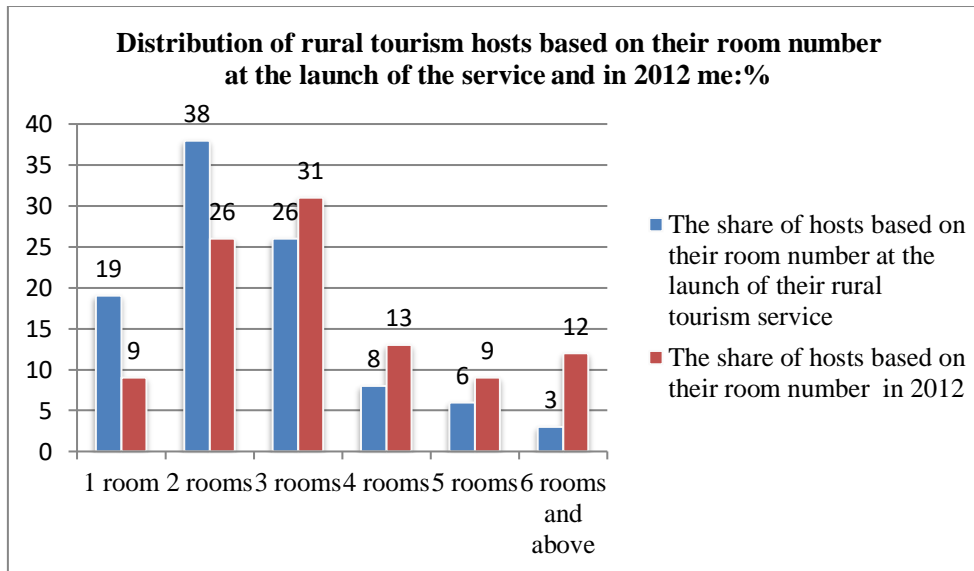
Rural tourism services in the literature are considered as a small-scale activity in terms of the capacity (number of guestrooms and beds). It is mainly connected to agricultural occupation or rural households and it creates employment for the unemployed family labour (women, unemployed, pensioners) and provides additional income, a kind of diminished or full salary.

The size and embeddedness of rural tourism is well reflected in the motivation of hosts choosing rural tourism services. 70% of the hosts in the sample selected the 'additional income' choice as their primary motivation. In the second place, 43% of the hosts selected the answer to deal with long term rural tourism "as way of life". Another 32% wanted to bring refreshing changes into their lives.

Every 5th respondent, about 18%, mentioned that they inherited a rural house and they did not want to leave it empty and wanted to do something with that. Another 18% mentioned that considering the state support it seemed a good business to start rural tourism venture.

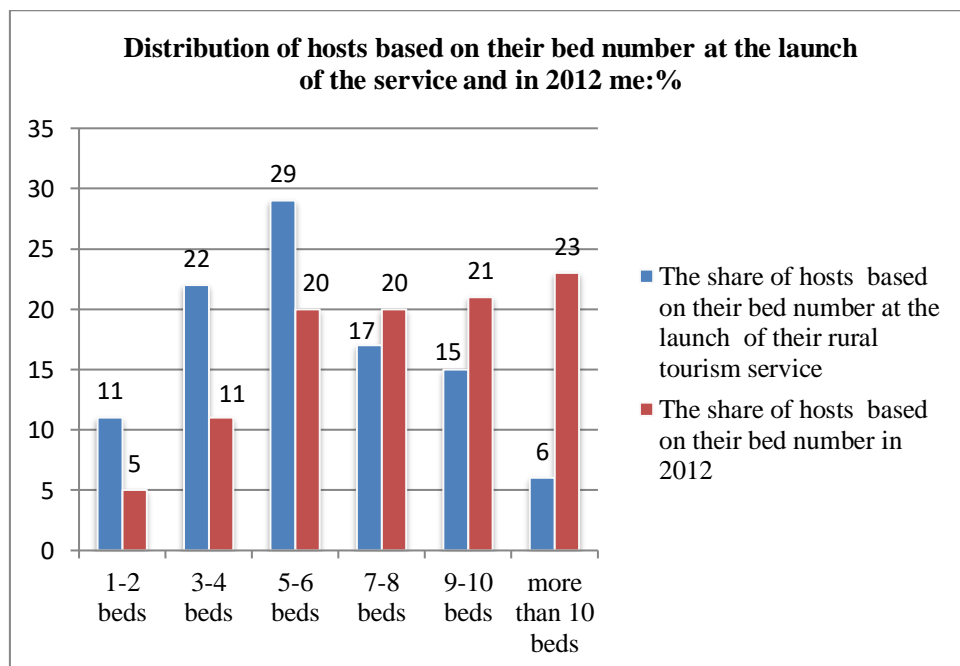
Small scale activity of rural tourism means a few room numbers and bed capacity. When the hospitality service started, 3 hosts from 5 had – at the most – only 1-2 rooms to let for guests (57%). Every 3rd host had 3 or 4 guestrooms (34%) and only every 10th host had 5 or more rooms.

Figure 3: Distribution of rural tourism hosts based on their room number at the launch of the service and in 2012



Source: Edited by the author

Figure 4: Distribution of rural tourism hosts based on bed number at the launch of the service and in 2012



Source: Edited by the author

About twenty years later, at the time of the survey (2012) the proportion changed towards the hosts who have more rooms and beds.

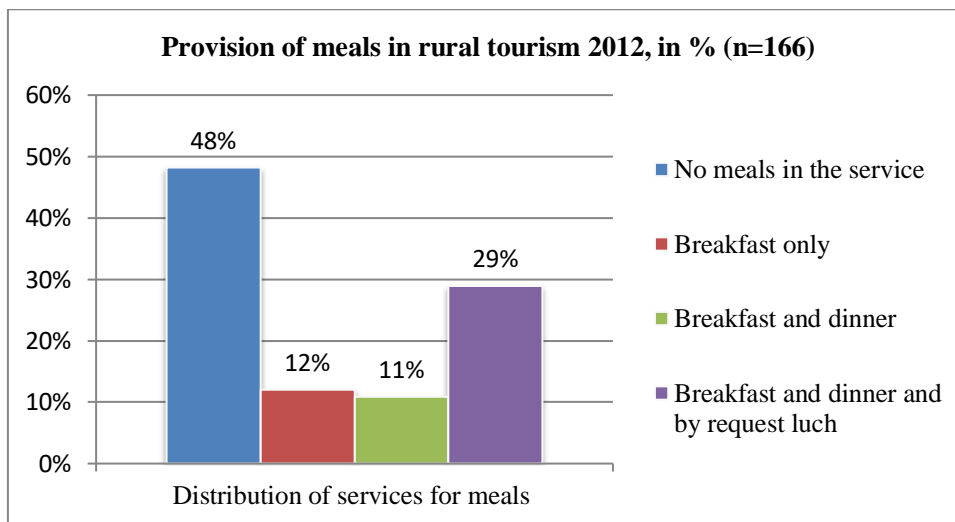
4. 2. Accommodation and meals

The basic issue of the regulation at the beginning of the nineties was the accommodation for the guests. The main rule was to put guests under the same roof with the hosts. In 2012 it was only 18% of the hosts who provided this type of accommodation. The guests stay in a separate guesthouses or apartments on the same plot with the host at the 28% of the homes. The distance is even larger when the guests stay in the host's village but in separate plots and guest houses, it is the case at 35% of the hosts. Finally, 21% of the hosts put their guests into their guest houses in different villages. During two decades the style of accommodation significantly changed. 'Under the same roof' requirement could not live for long. When it was implemented in Hungary at the beginning of the nineties, in Austria (which is much advanced in this field) there was a shift from that stage to accommodating the guests in separate apartments.

Besides the accommodation, the provision of meals and its circumstances belong to the essence of rural tourism. Local gastronomy can be an important attraction element for guests and also important income source for the hosts.

Half of the respondents (48%) answered that they do not provide meals for the guests, 12% provide only breakfast, 11% breakfast and dinner and 29% provide breakfast, dinner and lunch (if guests need it). Altogether, every second host does not provide meal for their guests and only one-third is ready to provide three times meal for their guests. The reasons of that can be scrutinised in each case, but it is obvious that more income can be generated via 'meals'.

Figure 5: Provision of meals in rural tourism in 2012, % (n=166)



Source: Edited by the author

4.3. The agricultural background of rural tourism

One of the characteristics of the Hungarian rural tourism is that only every 5th host has family farming behind the hospitality service (21%). Another group of hosts (28%) is still connected somehow to agricultural activities but not in the form of family farm.

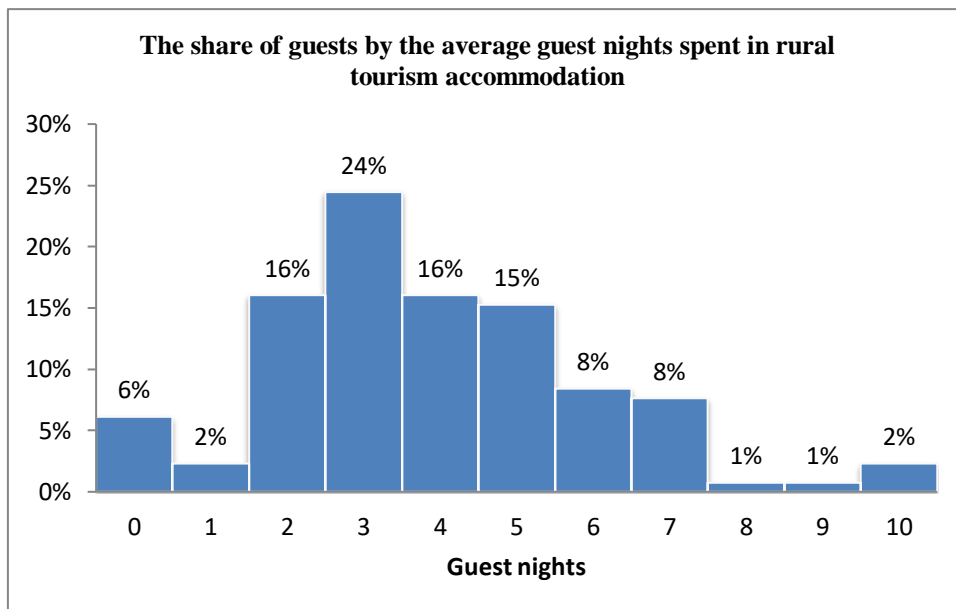
31% of the hosts have rural households but they do not have agricultural activities, and 16% of the hosts have completely different type of activities as the background of rural tourism and there is only 4% of the hosts who pursue handicraft activities. Practically half of the rural tourism hosts living in villages do not have a relationship to agriculture. This fact has to be seriously considered when the rules and regulations are formulated.

Half of the hosts (48%) pursue hospitality services besides their main job, and one-third (28%) of the hosts are already retired people. It is only every 7th or 8th host who pursues rural tourism venture as their main job (or she/he does not have other employment opportunity in his/her community). It is only 5% who pursue this activity as unemployed.

4.4. Duration of the holidays in rural tourism

At the beginning of the heydays of rural tourism in the nineties, due to the novelty of this type of holiday form, the guests often stayed 10 days or even two weeks in the premises of rural hosts. This practice has dramatically changed after the millennia, the holiday habits of people greatly changed. By the survey responses, one-fourth of the guests stay three guest nights on rural tourism premises in the main holiday season. Equally 15-16 % of the guests spend two, four or five guest nights in rural tourism accommodation.

Figure 6: Average guest nights number per holiday in the main season of rural tourism in 2012 (%)



Source: Edited by the author

It is very difficult to generate enough income to establish an independent workplace from rural tourism due to the short tourism season. Three-quarters of the hosts are open all year round and only one-fourth close for the winter period to spare the heating costs.

4.5. The attracting power of rural tourism

The attracting power of rural tourism lies on those rural values – such as traditions, gastronomy, agricultural activities, closeness to nature, close relationship with hosts – which are less and less familiar for urban people. They are attracted by the rural idyll or nostalgic appeal. The ‘rural’ is created by the eyes of urban visitors.

I wanted to know how the weight and importance of the attraction elements have changed over time. Respondents were requested to rank 7 attraction elements which play role in the selection of this type of tourism. These elements were the following:

1. close proximity to nature
2. garden and household animals,
3. good homemade food
4. traditions, traditional crafts
5. cheaper price
6. good personal relationship with the hosts
7. other attraction possibilities

By the hosts’ responses 52% of the guests select rural tourism because of the close proximity to nature. The second criterion by the hosts was the low price by 32% of the respondents.

The good personal contact with the hosts which was considered as the most important attraction in rural tourism was mentioned only by 9% of the respondents. The garden, animals, homemade food had been selected only by 3-3% of respondents, rural craftsmanship only got 1%. This assessment of the hosts shows that the attitude to rural attractions has changed. The former emphasis on the attractions as friendship with hosts, animals in the household, good food etc. seems to have slipped behind the values like close proximity to nature and low prices which has become the most attractive elements. This result is in accordance with Kulcsár Noémi’s research (2013) pursued among rural tourism customers. She expressed that the customers of rural tourism travel to the countryside in order to experience rural way of life, culture, nature and authentic programmes. Although, among them the most important aspect is the exploration of natural values and relaxation on fresh air in a nice environment. “We can witness the change of the basic product.... which is the nature centred. ...The rural lifestyle, culture, and heritage can be listed mainly to the range of additional services.”

Not only the attraction preferences of the guests but the ways how to get to the market and promotion of the product has changed significantly. Where are now the xeroxed or handwritten black and white throwaways and brochures with grammatical mistakes? After 2000 the internet and social media gradually became the main information channel and source for rural tourism, nevertheless the traditional word-of-mouth marketing is also very important. Three-quarters of the respondents claimed that the internet and the word of mouth help best in the arrival of guests. Other tools like catalogues, posters, exhibitions, advertisements have smaller shares in promotion.

The needs for financial support for development in order to improve the quality of services and accommodation was very articulate from the beginning of rural tourism.. 61% of the hosts expressed the need of less than 6 million HUF (approximately 20 thousand EUR). From another angle 8 in10 hosts would have requested under 10 million HUF (appr. 33 thousand EUR) development aid or subsidy. There was only two in the ten hosts who would have applied for more than 10 million HUF.

This issue is important because it shows the needs and financial capacity of the actual hosts in practice. The rural development support system defined much higher ceiling for rural tourism (around 50 million HUF, or 160 thousand EUR) development. The EU support covers 50 or 60% of the investment development. This available amount of subsidy for an operational host is unrealistically high compared to the actual financial conditions, the income generation possibility of the venture of the hosts in practice. On the other hand, there are no simple application procedures just very bureaucratic ones for those who request only much lower amount appropriate to their conditions. The consequence of this is that a new group of hosts would appear among the rural tourism hosts with different attitudes and needs. This high amount of subsidy also attracts some of those ‘entrepreneurs’ or party clientele who would build a house not with the aim of pursuing tourism services on the countryside but use it for family purposes.

There was a question in the survey about the procedures of the subsidy application. 90% of the respondents considered the application process bureaucratic or very bureaucratic.

Among the hosts who started their rural tourism services before 2000, there was only 10% who could get financial support (subsidy or EU grant). 70% of the supported hosts started their service after 2004, the date of the EU accession, and 40% of them pursued rural tourism services for 1-3 years.

5. Discussion

20-25 years is already a significant period in evolving and maturing a sector. In Hungary there were very high hopes, illusions and wishful thinking of the role of rural tourism at the beginning of the nineties. These were the years of optimism and enthusiasm, the start of new private enterprises, privatisation, pulling down the state ownership. Rural tourism got great media and political attention, but the latter was hardly more than a rhetoric. In other countries appropriate institutional background of rural tourism had been settled, advisory service, credits, state subsidies, and institutions like agricultural chambers and civic organisations helped local people to create their tourism services. In Hungary after the first years of spontaneous development of the nineties, a national umbrella organisation was established, the National Association of Rural Tourism to coordinate the activities of local associations and represent their interests towards political decision-makers. At the end of the nineties the name of the organisation was extended with the expression of ‘agritourism’. The National Association made enormous efforts to promote rural and agritourism hosts and services. The Association established a website, managed marketing and other types of trainings for hosts, organised a lot of promotional events, study tours, created a qualification system and implemented it. They trained their own quality inspectors from their members. They published regular newsletters, several thematic publications, organised national and international conferences. In 2007 the National Rural and Agri-tourism Association hosted the 3rd European Rural Tourism Conference. However, decent financing was missing during the whole period in order to create stability in the multifaceted volunteer activities of this Association. Membership fees were not enough to maintain a national organisation and the state was hardly willing to support their activities, although many of the fulfilled tasks should have been done by state organs. In the first period there was very high enthusiasm and ambition to learn and innovate among rural tourism hosts and provide quality services.

The Hungarian rural tourism supply due to its historical development can be considered as a mixed system. It does not represent a specific brand. The hosts of rural tourism by occupations, size, and activities do not constitute a homogeneous group. Private persons, enterprises, local governments, civic organisations, private and state companies, several professions and interests appear among rural tourism service providers. In Austria and Germany, and in the Scandinavian countries and Great Britain the ‘Holiday on the Farm’ brand belongs only to farmers. Other rural citizens like teachers, or chemist shop owners, shopkeepers or forestry companies etc. are not allowed to use this brand. These restrictions do not exist in Hungary therefore it is very difficult to create a specific brand that everyone can understand under rural tourism.

The Hungarian agricultural and rural policy never had clear concept about rural tourism.

After the political changes at the beginning of the nineties the main issue was to create family farming and farms, not farm diversification. Different governments and decision-makers following each other pushed rural tourism to different directions with their rules. A permanent element was only a supporting rhetoric (without practical measures) and positive attitude towards rural tourism. The early supporting measures and tax exemption gradually disappeared. Although a so called ‘guest table’ model to serve food and drink for guests was taken from abroad, after the first years of operation it was ruined by bureaucratic regulations. Even the already accepted brand name of rural tourism accommodation had been replaced by a neutral expression as “other tourism”. The qualification system, which was developed by the National Association and was a genuine community product, was taken over by the state and the state agencies created a centralised and bureaucratic system from it. The rural development policy based on EU regulations favours those who have bigger own resources and capital. The objective was to create enterprise-like units and services, similar to pensions and an indirect political goal was to create a rural clientele and supportive middle class via these subsidies. The support system favours those who have significant financial capital (in HU circumstances it means 100-150 thousand Euros own capital) and they still get the same amount or even more from the EU sources, if the investment occurs in a backward area. Newcomers to rural tourism build new units equipped with new facilities based on EU money. The results of the 2012 survey show that for the majority of rural tourism hosts the service activity meant an additional income besides their main jobs or pension. Rural tourism could provide enough income and main employment only to every 7th host. Due to the changes in demand and the emerging new fashions, the traditional forms of rural tourism, the 2-3 rooms, etc. are called now as ‘retro’ (the expression was used first by prof. Árpád Hanusz) rural tourism. Although the capacity numbers show an increasing trend, these are still within the scope of the defined rural tourism, which is in character still similar to the first period. However, there are new trends which point towards bigger and fancier units and different lifestyle and demand from the urban middle class.

Table 2: The main figures of rural tourism between 2009 and 2017

Period	Number of hosts (head)	Number of guest-rooms	Number of beds	Number of foreign guests	Number of Hungarian guests	All guests	Guest nights all	Average time spent in days
2009	7,534	19,877	49,327	22,042	214,353	236,395	720,603	
2010	3,976	10,639	27,998	10,105	128,745	138,850	415,884	3
2011	3,797	10,468	27,245	12,205	127,350	139,555	421,482	3
2012	3,186	8,864	22,977	9,451	109,861	119,312	349,150	2.9
2013	2,950	8,326	21,603	10,713	108,890	119,603	329,155	2.8
2014	2,805	8,048	21,119	11,556	121,149	132,705	373,711	2.8
2015	2,660	7,902	20,749	16,561	137,315	154,276	407,749	2.6
2016.	2,603	7,738	20,695	16,863	151,655	168,518	432,657	2.6
2017	2,395	7,118	19,029	19,103	137,064	156,167	420,592	2.7
2018	2336	6875	18533	18604	143861	162465	434410	2.7

Source: Central Statistical Office. The collection of data and observation of rural tourism accommodation ceased to exist since 2019. The data provided by local governments to CSO was often criticized as not reliable.

Joining to the EU, the pre-accession period already created more financial resources for rural tourism. The more of the resources meant more of the regulations as well. The positive discrimination from the first period ceased to exist, and the authorities implemented rather tight regulations. They demanded appropriate conditions which were more applicable to hotels and were not adequate for the small size rural tourism service providers. The main attractions of the first period, like friendly relationship of the hosts and guests, family hospitality, guest centred approach is slowly changing.

The abundance of resources for rural tourism attracts the younger generation and families, and entrepreneurs, who want to do rural tourism as a tourism enterprise and they have appropriate background to it. They represent the main group in the peculiar generation change.

In 2016-17 under the so-called diversification programme of rural development further 24 billion HUF was approved for rural tourism development for those who have at least 50% or more from their agricultural income. This call resulted in appr. 500 successful applicants. It is still not foreseeable how these new capacities transform the character of rural tourism supply and how successful the new hosts will be on the market.

The building of social capital, which is manifested in local cooperation, trainings, helping each other, slowed down and became loose. The social capital, cooperation, trust building is not a tangible value in the eyes of decision-makers in present Hungary, although it is absolutely crucial for the countryside.

The small size of the first rural tourism service providers as well as the economic crisis needed simple support system. Instead, increasing bureaucratism is the main characteristics of the supporting grant system.

The development cycle of rural tourism since the mid-nineties shows a slowly increasing trendline until 2009. Smaller changes occurred but in general there was a regular increase in terms of the number of hosts and guests and guest nights.

It was not foreseeable or no-one paid attention to what would happen by the end of the lifecycles of the rural tourism hosts. In other words, would there be successors of rural tourism in the host families who started these activities in the nineties?

After 15-25 years of services these lifecycles are closing down in those families, without continuation. The younger generation in the host families in most cases would not take over the service. They may live in towns, have different occupations, family and children and different ways of lifestyle. Therefore, the continuation of services via generations is very rare. The structure of the so-called nuclear families is not favourable for that. One group of newcomers for rural tourism are the already mentioned wealthier younger generations who have enough financial capital and they want to pursue rural tourism as an enterprise and hope to live from it as their main job. The other group of newcomers are those who look forward to their retired years after an active life. They still want to be active after retirement and they hope to find enjoyment and some additional money in rural tourism. They have their own facilities for the service.

The sociological character of rural tourism refers to the rural family and household. It seems, however, that due to the changing environment this character is going to be transferred to entrepreneurship, and a stronger focus on profits. Keeping local people in the countryside and providing them possibilities based on their own conditions, and help them to develop their social and cultural capital seems less important and articulated than it was before.

The above discussed issues reflect well that Hungarian rural tourism has arrived to a new position in the last years. The broadened understanding of the rural tourism phenomenon, the new subsidy forms via EU grants, the heavy competition from the popular and fancy wellness hotels were especially severe during the crisis years. The new entrepreneurs of rural tourism want to make money and profit from their investment.

The consumers' habits are also changing. The new consumer preferences, tastes and fashions in spending leisure time are different from the values of the previous decades.

During the economic crisis members of the middle class who regularly booked rural tourism accommodation and services either stayed at home or requested only bed even without breakfast. These changes caused trouble for some hosts who get used to the prosperity of the nineties. Small size rural tourism ventures have to compete for guests on the tourism market and the development resources are hardly available for them. (Kovács 2014, 2015, 2016)

6. Summary and conclusions

Rural tourism is a special tourism supply of a given period based on rural attractions, cultural and natural amenities and free family capacities. In the emergence of rural tourism, the market opportunities and the difficult economic conditions, namely the world economic crisis in the thirties and also the rural crisis in the nineties played a role. The third crisis during 2008 to 2010 as well as the new rules and regulations already cut in half the number of players of rural tourism and created a difficult position for them on the tourism market.

Rural tourism as a new phenomenon has brought cooperation and innovation and provided new opportunities for rural women for income generation. There are historical reasons in Hungary, World War II, collectivisation of agriculture, conditions of the early wild capitalism, which in turn resulted in a kind of mixed system in rural tourism. On the demand side there was the nostalgia for village life, community and traditions. Also, there was the desire after the illusion of real communities, the personalities of rural hosts, the activities with land, animals, and the garden.

The content and understanding of the rural tourism category have been broadened and became relative to the original concept. Not only rural women and households but wealthy entrepreneurs could also launch services under the flag of rural tourism. This mixed category is coming from the political environment concerning the countryside. The politics could not set up unambiguous rules concerning the transformation of agriculture and within that concerning the hospitality and gastronomy services of rural tourism.

After 15-20 years of development the rural tourism phenomenon reached a transitory period in 2009-10 in Hungary. The world economic crisis and a new tourism regulation and the generation change significantly impacted the circles of rural tourism hosts. The number of guests also dropped significantly. Other sectors of tourism fighting for their survival offered such low prices which attracted the former rural tourism clientele to the 4-star wellness hotels.

Due to the EU rural development policy significant amount of resources were poured into rural tourism. By 2015 approximately 10 thousand new bed capacity was created. This capacity still does not appear in the tourism figures. A certain share of this 10 thousand bed capacity replaces old capacities; however, the increased numbers should have appeared in the tourism statistics.

From rural tourism point of view the group of hosts will be divided into two parts. There are hosts who cultivate rural tourism services as additional income generation activity based on their existing resources and family accumulation. The other group of hosts build brand new guesthouses and facilities with the help of EU subsidies and enter into the tourism market.

The future of rural tourism with the COVID 19 pandemic has become very uncertain. It could easily happen that the pandemic wipes away all what we know about rural tourism and completely rewrites the rules and trends for the sector, and new, unknown scenarios will emerge in the future.

References

- CSIZMADIA, L. (1993): Falusi turizmus-környezetbarát turizmus oktatási összefüggései. Hőgyészi konferencia előadása. In: *A falusi turizmus hagyományai*. Mezőgazda Kiadó. 69-73p.
- CSORDÁS, L. (1998): Falusi Turizmus kézirat: HU95040101 Phare-program 283-329.
- DÁVID, L.-TÓTH, G.-KELEMEN, N.-KINCSES, Á. (2007): A vidéki turizmus szerepe az Észak-Magyarországi Régióban. *Gazdálkodás* 51.4. 38-57.
- JANIS, F. (2009): The role of tourism in rural development through a comparative analysis of a Greek and a Hungarian rural tourism area. PTE doktori dolgozat.
- KENÉZ, GY. (1996): Falusi turizmus fejlesztés a 30-as években. *A Falu* 1996/4 69-73p.
- KISS, K. (2001): Falusi Turizmus- eltérő értelmezések, eltérő piaci lehetőségek? *Turizmus Bulletin* V. évfolyam 1. szám- 2001. március
- KÓRÓDI, M. (2006): A vidék és a vidéki turizmusfejlesztés összefüggései a magyarországi kistérségekben. PhD- értekezés SZIE Gödöllő.
- KOVÁCS, D. (1995): A falusi turizmus és fizetővendéglátás értelmezéséhez. In: *A mezőgazdaságtól a vidékfejlesztésig* III. falukonferencia. MTA RKK Pécs352-356p.
- KOVÁCS, D. (2003): Falusi és vidéki turizmus értelmezések a nemzetközi irodalomban. In: *A falusi turizmus hagyományai*. Mezőgazda Kiadó.
- KOVÁCS, D. (2010): A vidék turizmusa. In: Kovács Dezső-Kulcsár László: *Vidékfejlesztési ismeretek Kriterion kiadó, Pro Ruris.* 9-66p.
- KOVÁCS, D. (2014): Élmény, élménygazdaság, élménytársadalom és turizmus. (Experience, experience economy, experience society and tourism). In: *Turizmus Bulletin* 2014. XVI. 3-4. szám 40-48p. http://szakmai.itthon.hu/2014/3_4

- KOVÁCS, D. (2014): From mass production to a genuine rural experience economy: the case of the Villány wine region in Hungary. In: Studies in Agricultural Economics. Vol. 116. No.1. 2014. AKI. 49-56p.
<https://www.aki.gov.hu/publaki/menu/k:Foly%C3%B3irat,+szaklap/b:Studies+in+Agricultural+Economics/m:current/o:Oldalsz%C3%A1m/d:n%C3%B6vek%C5%91/p:5/g:6>
- KOVÁCS, D. (2015): Falusi Turizmus Magyarországon – kérdések és dilemmák (Rural tourism in Hungary - questions and dilemmas). In: Területi Statisztika 55.évf.6. szám. 592-613p.
- KOVÁCS, D. (2016): Új jelenségek a falusi turizmusban Magyarországon (New phenomena of Rural Tourism in Hungary). In: Deturope - Central European Journal of Regional Development and Tourism. Volume 8. Issue 1. 39-60 p.
- KULCSÁR, L.-LAKNER, Z. (1995): A falusi turizmus helyzete és fejlesztésének lehetőségei Gazdálkodás XXIX. Évf.3.54-61p.
- KULCSÁR, N. (2013): A magyar falusi turizmus újabb átalakulása. A falu. Ősz. 5-18p.
- SÁGI, E. (1934): A falusi vendéglátás mestersége, A Magyar Királyi Balatoni Intéző Bizottság kiadványa. Budapest.
- SZABÓ, G. (1992): A falusi turizmus, mint a vidéki kisvállalkozás-fejlesztés egyik lehetősége. Juss 1992/4. 76-83p.
- SZABÓ, G. (1996): Tematikus kínálatok a vidéki turizmus fejlesztésében in: *A falusi turizmus, mint a vidéki térségek megújításának egyik esélye*. Falusi Turizmus Országos Szövetsége, MTA RKK Szombathely.