



## ASSESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF RURAL TOURISM: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

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**Abstract:** The assessment of the socio-economic impact of rural tourism is an essential research direction in the context of sustainable development of rural areas, given the increasingly important role of this sector in diversifying local economies and increasing the quality of life of communities. Rural tourism is frequently promoted as a tool for economic revitalization, but its effects are heterogeneous and depend on factors such as the level of infrastructure development, institutional capacity and the degree of involvement of local actors. In this context, rigorous analysis of the socio-economic impact becomes necessary to substantiate public policies and development strategies.

### • Introduction

In the context of economic and social transformations in rural areas, rural tourism is increasingly recognized as an effective tool for stimulating local development and reducing territorial disparities. The relevance of the theme derives from the need to rigorously assess the socio-economic impact of rural tourism, not only from a descriptive perspective, but through an integrated approach that highlights the relationships between tourism development and the dynamics of local communities.

Rural tourism contributes to economic diversification, job creation and the valorization of local resources, but it can also generate negative effects, such as pressure on infrastructure or increased seasonality. In this context, the use of a mixed-methods approach allows for a complex understanding of the phenomenon, combining quantitative analysis with the qualitative perspective of local actors.

### • Material and method

The paper aims to evaluate the socio-economic impact of rural tourism using a mixed methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component is based on the analysis of statistical data on the evolution of tourism indicators (accommodation capacity, arrivals, overnight stays). The qualitative component includes the documentary analysis of tourism development strategies, in order to capture the contextual dimensions and mechanisms of influence.

### • Results and discussions

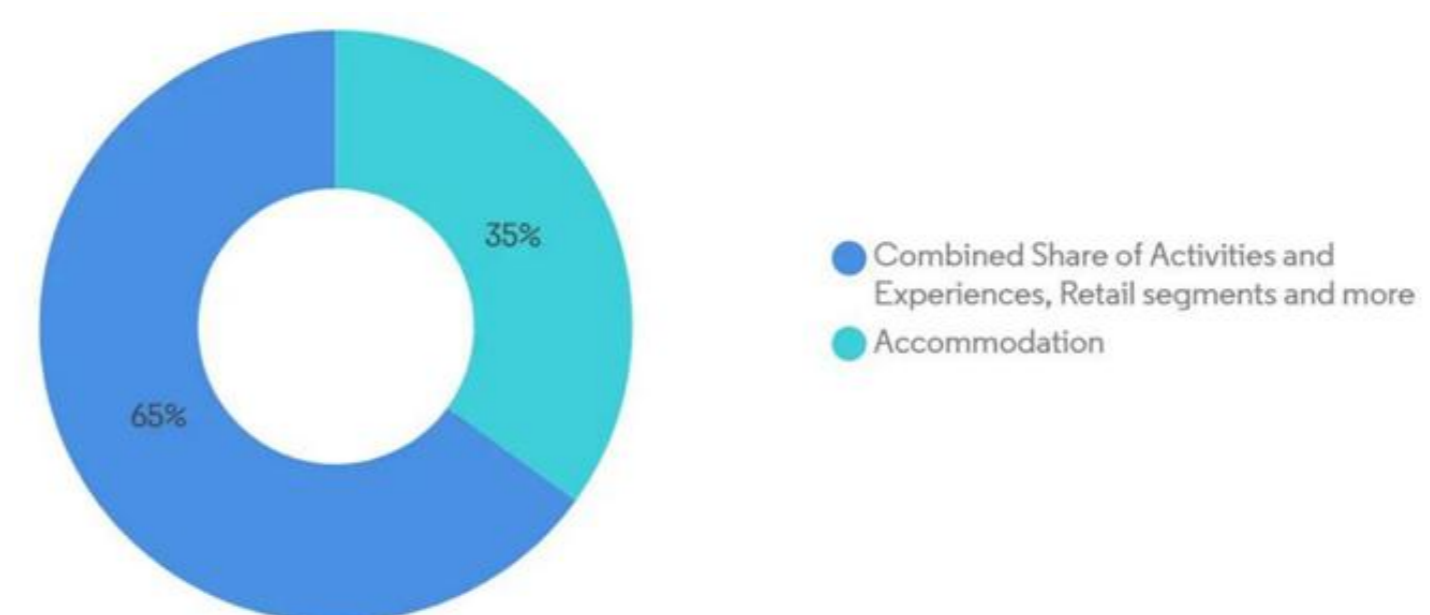
The results highlight the fact that rural tourism has a significant impact on the economic and social development of the analyzed communities, but the effects are differentiated depending on the level of tourism development.



**Figure 1. European overview of percentage of population employed in tourism-related sectors**

Tourism is also one of the most labor-intensive sectors of our economies. According to the WTTC, tourism supports 330 million jobs worldwide. To create a better understanding of the number of people working in the tourism industry, with the European Data Portal we created a visual (figure 2) based data from Eurostat. The figure shows information on the percentage of the active population working in tourism-related sectors.

The results show that the development of rural tourism contributes to increasing incomes and diversifying the local economy, reducing dependence on agriculture. At the same time, improvements in infrastructure are observed, due to investments generated by tourism activities.



**Figure 2. Agro-rural tourism market: Market share by revenue source, 2024**

The agri-stay (farm accommodation) segment accounted for 38.42% of the Agro-Rural Tourism market, driven by demand for immersive rural lodging experiences that combine accommodation with food, wine, cultural heritage, and educational farm activities. This segment benefits from established rural tourism ecosystems in mature destinations, where farms are integrated into hospitality networks offering structured packages. These packages attract domestic and international travelers seeking short-stay, nature-connected experiences near urban centers. Seasonal travel patterns, weekend tourism flows, and repeat visits tied to festivals, harvest cycles, and curated farm-to-table experiences contribute to high occupancy rates, enhancing revenue stability and reinforcing the segment's leadership.

From a social perspective, the results indicate a positive impact on community cohesion and social capital. The qualitative analysis highlights that rural tourism contributes to: developing social relations increasing community involvement valorizing cultural heritage.

### • Conclusions

The study confirms that rural tourism is an important factor of socio-economic development in rural areas, contributing to job creation, income growth and diversification of the local economy. At the same time, it stimulates social cohesion and community involvement, by developing relationships between local actors.

However, the impact of tourism is not exclusively positive, being accompanied by a number of challenges, such as seasonality, pressures on infrastructure and environmental effects. These aspects highlight the need for a balanced and sustainable approach to rural tourism development.

In conclusion, to maximize benefits and reduce negative effects, it is necessary to implement integrated public policies, aimed at:

- ❖ infrastructure development
- ❖ diversification of the tourist offer
- ❖ sustainable resource management

Rural tourism, analyzed through a mixed approach, proves to be a complex tool, with multiple implications for the development of local communities.