

TOURIST ACCOMMODATION IN RURAL AREAS

The Perception of the Entrepreneurs

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Rural tourism has been regarded as a form of sustainable development, regeneration, and promotion of rural areas. These usually are economically and socially depressed territories. Therefore, tourism development represents the possibility of fixing population, creating jobs and increasing incomes. The investment in rural tourism, mainly in accommodation facilities, is also a way to attract visitors. It is a complementary product in beach or urban tourism destinations. The main objectives of this study are to understand how the rural tourism entrepreneurs in Portugal, perceive their role and importance for tourism development and how they assess the most relevant factors for their success. The methodology used in this study is the application questionnaires to the rural tourism entrepreneurs in Portugal. The study considers all Types of rural tourism accommodations registered in the National Tourism Registration (Tourism of Portugal): Country Houses, Rural Hotels and Tourism Housing. The data were processed in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. The study highlights the reasons why these entrepreneurs invest and what are the main obstacles that limit their success. We refer, in particular, the high investment and low return due to limited tourism demand and a lack of networking. We conclude there is a need for a long-term technical and financial support and a product diversification strategy.

KEY WORDS: *Rural tourism, tourism development, entrepreneurship, tourism diversification.*