

## *Full Length Research Paper*

# **A comparative analysis of rural tourism development in Hungary and Greece**

**Anestis K. Fotiadis**

Litohorou 29A, Katerini, Greece. E-mail: [anesfot@gmail.com](mailto:anesfot@gmail.com).

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**In the present paper we study Greek and Hungarian villages which have different levels of rural tourism development. Through the use of personal field research, interviews of entrepreneurs occupied in rural tourism, we evaluate the similarities and differences that we discovered in our research, and we suggest the positive and negative steps for each country. We examine the way in which rural tourism is developed in the two countries which can be employed in the future by the public policy offices as a useful tool. By establishing the differences and the similarities, we can recommend the positive elements and eliminate the negative ones in each country's rural tourism development ways.**

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, rural tourism development, similarities and differences, Hungary, Greece.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The exploitation of the local potential in each region, the decentralization of decision making, the reinforcement of the local initiatives for the development of entrepreneurship, as well as the activation of the social mechanism of the "local conscience", constitute the reference framework of the new trends in local development (Saxena and Ilbery, 2010; Ferreyra et al., 2008). The aim is the achievement of more effective exploitation of each region's comparative advantages, the protection of the natural and human environment, and the promotion of the local sustainability (Anthopoulou, 2010).

The aforementioned framework also includes the development of tourism activities in rural (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008) and mountainous regions, which face problems of depopulation and rural income stringency. Agriculture should always be the main support of rural communities, rural tourism as a side line should provide more income and stability to farm households by adding new business opportunities (Arahi, 1998).

The key subject of this paper is to examine the potential differences and similarities in rural tourism development between Greece and Hungary through the study of geographically similar Greek and Hungarian regions as a paradigm, as a possible theoretical framework. We believe that this study can explore the way in which rural tourism is developed in each country and, it will be available for the public policy office as a useful tool in the future. Thus, by defining the differences and the similarities, we can suggest the positive elements which should be developed and the negative ones which should

be eliminated in order to promote rural tourism development in both countries.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There have been a lot of researches on rural tourism development of countries in Europe (Perales, 2002; Devesa et al., 2010; Sharpley, 2002; Kastenholz et al., 1999; Embacher, 1994; Opperman, 1996; Alexander and Mckenna, 1998; Sharpley and Jepson, 2010) and some of them are about ex European communist countries (Ramanauskienė et al., 2006; Koscak, 1998; Verbole, 1996; Clarke et al., 2001; Nita and Manolescu, 2005; Turnock, 1990; Iorio and Corsale, 2010; Cihar and Stankova, 2006). Definitely, there are a great number of other national studies (Fletcher and Pizam, 1997; Reichel et al., 2000; Murphy and Williams, 1999; Knight, 1996; Luloff et al., 1994; Gartner, 2004; Park and Yoon, 2009) but unluckily there are not enough comparable studies between countries. More specifically, there has been only one study comparing an ex communist country and a country-member of the European Union (Hegarty and Przeborska, 2005). However, there has not been any study until now comparing Greece and Hungary.

Recently, a few established destinations have expressed interest in rural tourism with the aim of differentiating their tourism product and market and spreading the advantages of tourism to reach the coastal resorts and the inland as well (Sharpley, 2002). The provision of

accommodation for tourists is now a basic element of agricultural business (Hall et al., 2005). The essential elements of rural tourism are rooms in small dwellings, in rural regions or villages. These dwellings are basically family enterprises, where rural tourism stands for the primary occupation or an extra source of income apart from agriculture (Zvaigzne, 2005). One useful way of understanding better the rural tourism attitudes which are associated with community involvement and changes, is through regional surveys (Petzelka et al., 2005).

In the case of countries such as Greece and Hungary, the differences regarding how rural tourism is implemented are considerable, since the rural tourism product in Greece is basically characterised by the provision of bed and breakfast, in traditionally furnished rooms with traditional breakfasts usually including home-made products (Michalkó and Fotiadis, 2006). Hungary is still in a primary level as the main form of rural tourism is the one in family farm or house in the village where guests may stay with the farmer's family or in a guest room, and they usually share the same dinner with the family (Fotiadis et al., 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

For the achievement of the proposed objectives, we have used data collected in a survey designed for hosts in rural tourism destinations in Greece and Hungary. Rural tourism in the chosen regions can be characterized as a reliable, representative sample of rural tourism in Greece and Hungary, which currently constitutes a developing segment of the market and also a crucial resource for the inner provinces. In January and February 2007 interviews were taken in Hungary and in May 2007 interviews were taken in Greece.

In order to get answers about the same issues in both countries we used a standardized questionnaire so as to ask the same questions in both cases. During the data collection, we attempt to depict the profile and the special characteristics of the study region. The region's presentation should not be a simple static representation of its current conditions, but it should have a historical, diachronic dimension. In addition, it should reflect, to a feasible extent, the particular needs and prospects of the population. Therefore, we studied three Greek and three Hungarian villages. The examined Hungarian villages are Kárász, Magyaregregy, Szászvár and the Greek villages are Vria, Ritini and Elatochori. The selection of the specific regions was based on various criteria, including: significant employment declines in natural resource sectors such as agriculture and forestry, and their geographical characteristics and landforms such as mountains, rivers, canyons and other natural amenities. Additionally, we examined the hosts in each country in order to discover how they developed their activity, what their mistakes were as well as their similarities and differences.

## RESULTS

In order to collect data relevant to our study, we interviewed hosts in both countries. At the Hungarian villages where there were 32 hosts, we interviewed 30, producing a 93.75% response rate. At the Greek villages where there were 11 hosts, we interviewed 1, producing a 100.00% response rate. Totally, out of the 41 host, 39

were interviewed, producing a 95.12% response rate.

The interviewees in Hungary have been generally occupied in the host business for 7 years, 10% of them joined the previous year (2005). There is only one person who has worked in rural tourism for a long period of time, 14 years in particular. Obviously, they have joined gradually after the change in the governmental system. Up to 1990 no one of them were related to rural tourism, but since then the number of people joining in has been increasing. Concerning Greece, the interviewees have been working in host business generally for 3 years; 45% of them joined two years ago (2005), because at that time they were all subsidized by the Greek government and the European Community.

In Hungary 10% has ceased providing accommodation for more than a year. Two of the reasons why they stopped according to the Hungarian Hosts were serious disease (two Hosts) and building reconstruction (one Host). In Greece, on the other hand, none of the enterprises has stopped its function. When we study the total sample, we see that 7.32% has stopped providing accommodation services for at least, one year. This entails that, the Hosts in Greece are active in a more professional level than the Hungarian Hosts in the rural tourism sector.

In order to determine the occupational background of the Hosts and discover the changes they have been through, we inquired them about their work before rural tourism. We wished to know whether the majority of them had been farmers or unemployed. In case most of the Hosts were classified in one of these groups, it would entail that rural tourism is useful to the community since it produces new employment posts. In case most of them used to be private workers, it would mean that they were in quest for a new perspective and rural tourism gave them the opportunity to move to a more interesting and profitable occupation. In case most of them used to be entrepreneurs, it would mean that their previous experience played an important role in perceiving and adjusting fast and easily to the upcoming changes. In Hungary, most of the hosts used to be private workers (43%) or retired (36%) before rural tourism. Apart from them, women with young children take part in the host providing activity. It is remarkable that almost no entrepreneurs (3%) or unemployed are involved.

We should highlight that the misconception according to which only old retired people are involved in rural tourism, now seems to dissolve. The state in the Greek villages is completely different in this matter because all the Hosts were entrepreneurs (72%) or private workers (28%) in the past. The fact that the percent of the unemployed ones is only 2.4%, which is unsatisfying since it seems that rural tourism does not produce new employment posts for new hosts. Even though in Greece, the development of new enterprises is subsidized with 15.000€, there are no Hosts who used to be unemployed. In the Greek villages, no one of the Hosts has worked in

the primary sector, while in Hungary the count is only 16.7%. Thus, we draw an important conclusion; the village tourism Hosts do not come from the agricultural sector, but from the service sector, which enables them to exploit and transfer their experience, their practice and attitude to their new occupation. Nevertheless, this contrasts the reason why rural tourism is growing, which is the support of the agricultural sector by an additional income.

The interviewees in both countries claim that the living reasons are not important; the factors concerning the family living together and the use of the family house are what matter. In Hungary the reasons behind the practice of the rural tourism activity are the occupation, the social role and the preservation of the building's shape. The extra income is also considerable, but it is in the background, just like the assuring of living. The reason why may be that the village business is not such a big business. In Greece the extra income is crucial because rural tourism is similar to the hotel industry, where it is often enough just to run the hostel.

For most of the Greek Hosts the income they produce from their rural tourism activity represents their main income, but this is not the case for most of the Hungarian Hosts. This could be explained by the fact that Greece has been a member of the European Union for more years than Hungary and more money have been invested on the rural tourism development. One interesting difference between the Hungarians and the Greeks is that for the first group rural tourism activity is like a hobby, while for the second it is mainly a financially profitable activity. This is without doubt associated with the next question since the Greeks obviously rent more rooms than the Hungarians.

In Hungary a great count of 96.7% rents only one room, while in Greece, there are not any Hosts renting only one room. In average, each Greek host rents 10 rooms. In Greece, 90.9% rent more than three rooms, in contrast to Hungary where there is not anyone renting more than three rooms. This is the basic difference between rural tourism development in Greece and Hungary, as in Greece rural tourism represents the basic occupation and the basic income for the Hosts, while in Hungary it represents an additional income and a complementary occupation.

We also wished to find out whether in Hungary, where rural tourism is described as more professional, the Hosts occupy more staff. Since the Hungarian host has only one room to rent (house), all of them claim that they cannot work alone and need help, which comes mostly from the family members. None of the Hosts in Hungary hires staff, not even for a limited time period; this cannot contribute to the decrease of unemployment recorded in Greece. In Greece, 36.4% of the Hosts have regular staff and 18.2% hire someone for a short period of time. This can be explained because in Greece the average of the available rooms is much higher than in Hungary.

In Hungary the rural tourists arrive mainly from the

neighboring countries for their summer holidays, while in Greece the tourists are basically Greeks who spend their weekends at the rural villages. Additionally, seasonality is completely different since in Hungary the spring and autumn periods are very dynamic, while in Greece winter is the most dynamic season. This can be explained mainly because the two countries have a different type of tourism. The Greek visitors in the Greek villages are the ones who usually visit the coastal regions during the summer. In the Hungarian villages the visitors are foreigner and Hungarians who usually travel when the weather is good (spring and autumn).

During our personal visit at the villages, we observed that they covered premises and environment, and therefore we tried to find what they offered along with the rented room. It is remarkable that 26.8% of the Hosts provide only accommodation without breakfast or any other type of meal. When the tourist wishes to have breakfast or one or two meals, he/she has to pay an extra price. More specifically, the percentage of Hosts who offer a meal at an extra price represents 61.0%. It is interesting that in both countries the percent of the meals that are included in the price reaches only 2.4%. However, it is auspicious that both countries, at a high percentage, offer traditional drinks, such as ouzo and palinka, marmalade and honey. In Greece the percent of sausages provided is low, while in Hungary, which is famous for its sausages, the exact opposite happens.

Another difference is that at the Hungarian villages the tourists are able to join in the works of the house (50%) while the visitors at the Greek villages are not given this opportunity. Nevertheless, they are both able to look into a village family's life. Even though there are elements that need to be improved in both countries, their visitors seem to be pleased by their stay and this explains the returning rate of 42 and 30% proportionately. This shows that both countries have the natural beauty and the essential characteristics that can lead to further tourism development. Between the two countries there are a lot differences concerning the activities their visitors are involved in. In Greece, the main activities of the tourists are reading, watching TV, making trips to the countryside and the neighboring villages and towns, and walking around the village. On the other hand, in Hungary they do not make trips to the neighboring villages and towns, or strolls in the same village. This can be explained in two ways; either the villages in Hungary are able to keep their visitors always in the village, which produces greater profit for them, or it is related with the characteristics of the tourists. Thus, marketing and development strategies in both countries should seriously take into account the customers' needs and work accordingly in order to satisfy them.

As far as promotion and information through marketing and communication channels are concerned, word of mouth is crucial for the rural tourism operators (Verenzi, 2002). They employ other tools, as well, and we tried to find which ones work for the rural Hosts. Our basic aim

**Table 1.** General similarities and differences between Greece and Hungary.

Variable	Differences	Similarities
Climate	√	
Landscape	√	
History	√	
House Style	√	
Religion	√	
Society Type	√	
Morphology	√	
Background of Rural Hosts	√	
Reasons for rural tourism development	√	

was to ascertain whether they advertise their enterprise in the right way and whether they present information in an understandable and realistic way.

The tourists learn about the territories mainly through the internet and brochures the hosts distribute to advertise their company. In Hungary, it seems that they use two ways of advertising, through tourinform and fatosz. While in Greece the Agrotouristiki S. A. assists their promotion. Due to the limited financial potential of the Hungarian rural tourism companies, they cannot pay for TV or radio advertisements. As someone can observe in the Hungarian advertisement, in the internet we can find information in four different languages and the focus is on the environment and not on the quality of the house. In the Greek case the exact opposite happens; in the personal website of one of the Hosts, what is advertised, is the house (hotel) and not the general environment. That is because the hotel is very beautiful and luxurious. We believe that these differences between the two countries can be explained by the fact that they address different target groups, as mentioned before.

The percentages of applications to a European developmental program between the two countries are reverse. In Greece, the percentage is high (63.6%), while in Hungary the percentage is quite low (26.7%). At this point we should highlight that Greece has been a member of the European Union for more than two decades, while Hungary has recently joined the Union. The final question of our interview tried to explore the matter of the relationships between the host and the social environment. We wished to learn whether the village population feels envy for the hosts because of their rapid development and how this may affect their relationships. We also tried to explore their connection with other entrepreneurs, the local government and others. Our aim was to check whether success is associated with bad relationships.

The answers to our questions regarding social relations show that the relationships between the hosting and social environment are in good terms and it appears that the success is based on the cooperation between hosts, local government, local community and visitors. Naturally,

there are differences across the two countries since the Greeks appear to have better relations with the local community than the Hungarians, but their relations with the local government and tourist offices are worse. Even though the two countries have a lot of similarities regarding their rural tourism contexts, the contrast between them displays remarkable differences in the processes and outcomes of their rural tourism development. These similarities and differences can be classified into the following wide categories:

1. General similarities and differences, such as climate
2. Similarities and differences in management
3. Similarities and differences in marketing
4. Similarities and differences in public policy

In each category, there are more differences than similarities. Public policy is the only category where there are more similarities than differences

### General similarities and differences

Rural tourism cannot be similar around the European countries because the rural regions in Europe have different characteristics. Climate, landscape, history and population density differ in some cases significantly and the first differences and similarities that we detect between Greece and Hungary are the ones associated with these characteristics (Table 1). A study of the history of the two countries proves that they both have been in the foreground for hundreds of years. Of course, Hungary falls short of ancient history in comparison to Greece, but the history of Hungary during the middle ages is more interesting. This can be explained basically because while the Austro-Hungarian kingdom was flourishing, Greece was under ottoman occupation. This difference has an impact on rural tourism because the visitor of the rural village is interested in sightseeing in the nearby villages and towns. The two countries are also different as far as the architecture of the houses in rural tourism regions is concerned. In Greece the houses are mainly of

**Table 2.** Basic indicators similarities and differences between Greece and Hungary.

Basic Indicators	Differences	Similarities
Visitors		√
Tourists (overnight visitors)	√	
Same-day visitors		√
Cruise passengers		
Arrivals by region: Africa		
Arrivals by region: Americas		√
Arrivals by region: Europe	√	
Arrivals by region: East Asia and Pacific		√
Arrivals by region: South Asia		
Arrivals by region: Middle East		
Arrivals by means of transport used: Air	√	
Arrivals by means of transport used: Rail	√	
Arrivals by means of transport used: Road		√
Arrivals by means of transport used: Sea	√	
Tourism expenditure in the country	√	
Travel	√	
Passenger transport	√	
Departures		
Tourism expenditure in other countries	√	
Travel	√	
Passenger transport	√	
Gross domestic product (GDP)		√
Exports of goods	√	
Export of services		√

old Macedonian style, while in Hungary they have the 1960s structured style.

Religion is crucial in both countries and one similarity that we have detected is that the villages in both countries have a dominating church in the central square, which can be a tourism resource (Table 1). The type is naturally different as in Greece there are orthodox and in Hungary catholic churches.

One significant similarity is linked to the population of the two countries as they both have almost 11 million residents. Nevertheless, there is a difference in this matter since in Hungary the population tends to decrease, while in Greece it tends to increase. Another minor difference between the examined rural villages regarding the rural tourism stakeholders is that the Greek rural communities are much more masculine than the corresponding Hungarian ones. That is why, in Greece, rural tourism development can play a social role by contributing to the improvement of the status of the woman in the rural society.

Based on secondary data from the statistical services

of the two countries we can ascertain that there are various similarities and differences in the basic indicators (Table 2). We can see differences on overnight visitors, arrivals from Europe, arrivals by air, railway and sea. We can also notice that there are important differences in tourism expenditure in each country by inbound tourism and tourism expenditure in other countries by domestic tourists. There are similarities on visitors, on arrivals from America and East Asia. Similar are also the arrivals by road, the gross domestic product and the export of services.

There are crucial differences in morphology (Table 2). Greece is extensively washed by the Mediterranean Sea; there are a few high mountains and some plains. On the contrary, Hungary is not washed by the sea, it does not have high mountains, but it has large plains. In addition, in Hungary, there are long rivers, such as the Danube which is dominant, and a huge lake (Balaton), while in Greece there are small rivers and lakes. These differences affect to a large extent the rural tourism development in each country, because the differences in morphology

**Table 3.** Supply, demand and management similarities and differences between Greece and Hungary.

Variable	Differences	Similarities
Rural tourism development rhythm		√
Small tourism period		√
Rural tourism best period	√	
Rural host product		√
Type of rural tourism product	√	
Creation of rural tourism accommodation		√
Continuing rural tourism entrepreneurship	√	
Type of accommodation	√	
Limitations in rural tourism management		√
Traditional products		√
Rooms	√	
Modulation		√
Rural tourism markets	√	
Rural tourism average	√	
Revisiting		√
Work during holidays	√	

compel them to provide a different product. Thus, rural tourism is more easily combined with rural activities in Hungary than in Greece where rural tourism can more easily be combined with other forms of tourism such as winter sports, climbing, etc. In Greece, the climate is Mediterranean and the levels of temperature are often higher than in Hungary which has a continental climate. So, in Hungary it rains and snows more often than in Greece. This means a longer period of mass

Therefore, we believe that rural tourism is more crucial for Hungary than for Greece. Greece as a country has achieved to gain incomes from tourism for a longer period of time regardless of the resources. Rural tourism is able to contribute to the extension of the tourism periods in both countries and consequently of their incomes.

One significant difference is the background of the rural tourism hosts. In Greece, the people who work in rural tourism are basically entrepreneurs or public servants, while in Hungary they are mainly pensioners or private employees and approximately 15% farmers. This is astonishing for the public policy perspective since it proves that both countries has been unsuccessful in what rural tourism defines, which is mainly the support of the farmers in order to maintain their property. This means that the farmers of the six villages had not realized the existence of opportunities available to them and they were seized by entrepreneurs or private employees who knew how to operate within the business environment. This can be characterized as positive element since the Hosts can apply the good practice and attitude they have already acquired. Nevertheless, a serious problem for the public policy of both countries is that the motive of the providers was mainly their wish to feel security or their wish to exploit a spare place they have; so that only 17%

of them work for extra income. This parameter should be considered seriously by the two countries since one of the objectives of rural tourism is not achieved, that is occupation as an extra income.

### Supply, demand and management

The two countries display a fast rate of development. However, in the case of Greece our conclusions depend on the speculations of the responders, while in the case of Hungary we depend on actual statistical data. The positive aspect is that, in supply and demand, both countries have an important rural tourism development (Table 3). Additionally, concerning demand there are similarities because the tourism period is short, regardless of the fact that in both cases the houses are available throughout the year.

One similarity regarding supply is that in both countries most of the rural tourism accommodations were built in the last three years, with subsidies mainly from the European Union. Moreover, another similarity concerns what is offered along with the accommodation (Table 3). The Hosts in both countries either do not include in the price any other provision apart from the room or they include only breakfast. It is striking that most of them can offer all the meals a client may ask at an additional price. Another similarity in supply is that the hosts who offer meals, serve them only in the place where the visitors stay. This means that the customers do not need to eat and spend their money somewhere else. Nevertheless, the negative aspect is that in both countries the tourists are not offered the same meal with the local community, but something that is specially prepared for them. Thus,

**Table 4.** Marketing similarities and differences between Greece and Hungary.

Variable	Differences	Similarities
Promotion style		√
Internet		√
TV	√	
Brochures		√
Radio	√	
Tourist offices		√
Product	√	
Price	√	
Market	√	
Tourist behavior	√	
Tourist participation in festivals and other		√
Colours in brochures	√	
Promoting via brochures	√	
Websites		√
Sponsoring via websites	√	
Promoting via websites		√

the tourists are not able to taste and experience the local gastronomic habits, which is one of the reasons someone visits a place. The two countries also have some similarities in the traditional products that the tourists can buy.

The majority of the rented rooms are in the same land site and also in the same building with the Hosts' house, but the visitors use another entrance. However, a lot of rooms are found in a different land site. So, the offered product may be different but there is similarity in this respect. This happens probably because the Hosts in both countries know that in this way the visitors experience more comfort and hospitality and that results in a high percentage of revisiting. A difference regarding demand and management is associated with the length of the tourism period. In Greece it appears that the rural tourism activity is basically available in the winter months, while in Hungary in the summer. This could be explained because each country's rural tourism product addresses a different market. Hungary attracts more foreign tourists than Greece. Greece attracts basically Greek tourists. From our point of view, both countries have the potential to raise their effectiveness, if they achieve to attract the tourists they lack. Hungary could attract visitors from its domestic winter tourism and Greece could attract foreign visitors through the summer tourism.

A significant difference in supply between the two countries is that the average of rural tourism hosts has been active in Hungary for 7 years, but in Greece for only 3 years. This is remarkable as Greece has been a member of the European Union for a longer period of time than Hungary which has only recently joined the Union. In addition, we need to mention that in Greece the hosts do not cease their rural tourism activity, even though the summer visitors are not many, while in Hungary there is a

minor percentage who have stopped their rural tourism activity for at least one year.

On more difference in supply is the size and the type of the offered product (Table 3). In Hungary the rented houses are usually small with one, two or in some rare cases three rooms. In Greece hotel rooms are rented. Most of the hosts rent 10 to 25 rooms and hence the activity is exercised in a more professional way which is close to mass tourism. The Greek rooms resemble more luxurious hotel suites with a fireplace made of expensive materials, while the Hungarian houses are simpler and thus, the management and marketing in general seem to be more amateur. This difference affects the management, the marketing and the public policy followed by each country. This point can explain also why in Greece the visitor is not given the chance to perform, if he/she wishes, or even watch a rural activity, but in Hungary this opportunity is extensively available.

### Marketing

In the marketing field there are very few similarities and mainly differences (Table 4). There are similarities in the way they advertise their enterprises. They mainly use the internet, advertising brochures and tourism offices. Definitely, the crucial point is what they advertise using these means and who they address. One step before the application of a promotional policy by an enterprise or an organization is to specify the target group. It appears that Greece and Hungary have not specified their targets, as they use the same advertising strategy, but they differ in the product, the price and their current access to some markets. The two countries differ in the tourism product

as Eastern Europe is generally more rural than Western Europe (in terms of levels of urbanisation, and socio-cultural characteristics) and also the Greek product is close to village tourism while the Hungarian is closer to farm tourism. The difference in prices is significant in relation to who it addresses. In Greece the prices are quite high, but in Hungary they are lower. As we have already mentioned. Hungary addresses basically foreign tourists from the neighboring countries, while Greece addresses Greek tourists. Many foreign tourists wish to visit Hungary because in the past they could not and they find the prices extremely low. Greece attracts them because it is now a trend.

These elements can explain the similarities and differences between the two countries concerning the way in which the visitors spend their free time. In Greece the tourists read books, watch TV, walk around the countryside, the village or visit the nearby villages and towns. On the other hand, these activities are rare in the case of Hungary. The tourists in Greece astonishingly do not prefer activities such as riding a bike or horse, manual activities, etc. However, Hungary is famous for its horses and these activities take place quite often. One similarity in this respect is visitors' wish to take part in activities such as festivals either in or out of the village.

The study of the websites employed by the rural enterprises for their advertising have some similarities and few differences between the two countries. In the websites of Agrotouristiki S.A. and Fatosz, the visitor can find general information about rural tourism and specific information about rural tourism accommodation. The Greek website basically addresses the Greek tourists, while the Hungarian the foreign ones. The Hungarian website does not make reference to ways in which someone can be subsidized by the European Union, but in the Greek one there is a hyperlink which provides easily all the essential handlings. The websites of both countries share the negative characteristic- in terms of public policy- that they do not advertise all the hosts, as they have to pay for their promotion. In our view the two countries, since they are aware of the serious problems rural societies face, this would enable free promotion of their accommodation.

### Public policy

Greece has been a European Union member for a longer period of time than Hungary and this is reflected in the intensity of each country's activity in the sector of public policy. To be more specific, in Greece 63.6% of the Hosts have been subsidized by the European Union, and while the same percentage in Hungary is much lower 26.7%. Even though Hungary comes second in comparison to Greece, it is gradually developing well.

In the field of public policy, Greece faces the serious problem of lack of statistical data on rural tourism. Hence,

it is difficult to judge safely whether a policy is successful or not, unless there is some other way of comparing and contrasting a past and a future situation. On the other hand, Hungary collects statistical data, even about the contribution of rural tourism to a community's incomes. Thus, in Hungary it is easy to activate a statistic and elicit countable results.

The results of our study show that the policies followed by the two countries are successful; the host we interviewed claim that they result in continuous development and high levels of revisiting. These policies have also led to some similarities and differences in the relationships between the hosts and their social environment. The hosts in both countries have developed positive relationships with the entrepreneurs and with the local government (Table 5). Nevertheless, there are differences regarding their relationships with the local community, the tourism offices and with the restaurants and entertainment enterprises in and out of the village. On the one hand, the hosts in Greece seem to have a better relationship with the local community and with the restaurants and entertainment enterprises in and out of the village than the hosts in Hungary who have a better relationship with the tourism offices.

### DISCUSSION

The new millennium brings about gradual changes in the field of rural tourism, especially in the preferences and the demands of a wide share of tourists, and also in the image of the rural society. The tourist wants to see new landscapes and fulfill not only his/her need for diversion, resting, serenity and revitalizing, but also his/her need to learning about the nature and the rural sector. These needs become more important for the city people who face the usual problems environmental pollution, noise and stress. Therefore, the tourists try to find in nature all these things that the city life deprives them of. Mass tourism cannot provide calmness, contact with nature, learning and participating in a region's culture and tradition; but rural tourism fills this gap. Undoubtedly, European regional policy and EU environment policy in general played a crucial role in the processes of formal institution building and in extending a new culture of coordination and/or cooperation among actors involved in policy making. Because of the development of rural tourism, tourism is treated as guest in agricultural development, and the rural host does is not only the manager, but also the one who welcomes and guides the visitor in order to experience hospitality in the hosting environment. The present and the future development of rural tourism in Greece and in Hungary need a set of measures and initiatives, such as the following:

1. Recording and shaping the natural and cultural map of each country, which will include the existing rural tourism



**Table 5.** Public policy similarities and differences between Greece and Hungary.

Variable	Differences	Similarities
European Union sponsoring	√	
Reason for sponsoring		√
Statistical data	√	
Need for public policy help		√
Successful Policies		√
Relationship with social environment		√
Good relationship with local government		√
Relationships with other entrepreneurs	√	
Local society	√	

regions and all the socio-economic characteristics that can contribute to rural tourism development

2. Involvement of the local authorities and residents in the managing and control of the development, aiming at preserving the local character and keep the added value of the providing services on the local level

3. Promotion of rural tourism as an activity which complements and reinforces the rural income, which is characterized by a determined frame of principles for its development

4. Encouraging and advertising of rural tourism initiatives, which have been effective and well-organized.

5. Building the appropriate infrastructure, for example, roads, for easier access of the visitors to the regions, medical care for the sensitive groups, such as the elderly, the children, etc., improvement of the means of transport, electric power supply, water supply etc.

6. Extension of the tourism season throughout the year, which can help in the improvement of the hospitality services, along with decrease of their cost.

7. Satisfying the visitors' need not only at the level of accommodation (clean and comfortable rooms), but also their interests in rural life and tradition.

8. Development of national and regional rural tourism programs in terms of the European Union guidelines, which can be subsidized.

9. Constitution of a framework of measures for the protection of the environment and for the maintenance of the cultural and tourism heritage.

10. Measures for the restoration of the traditional settlements which attract the visitors (renovation and maintenance of traditional houses, churches, monasteries etc.)

11. Publication and distribution, even out of the limits of the Municipality or the Community, of tourist guides and brochures on the rural tourism of the region and its traditional products.

12. Professional training programs for the residents of the rural regions and foreign language learning programs at a basic level, so as to prepare them to fulfil the demands of the parallel rural tourism activities (especially for the young people and the women, so that they can take more initiatives).

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, rural tourism has contributed to the further growth of developed economies and to the economic restructuring of the weaker European economies as well. The activities related with travel, tourism and recreation affect people in many different ways and have an obvious effect on social, cultural and economic perspectives of life in any society. The rural tourism industry incorporates a number of different sectors, such as hospitality, food and crafts, and can provide considerable benefits for local rural regions. Yet rural tourism incites changes in employment or customer protection, health, new technology, transport and culture. According to the European tourism authorities and policy advisors rural tourism is able to provide a "development path" for rural Europe. However, central and eastern European countries have been through different structural conditions to those of Western Europe and did not take part in the processes of agricultural restructuring accompanying the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (Hegarty and Przezborska, 2005). Greece and Hungary were not indifferent to the forthcoming changes, as rural development today focuses on greater equality for all rural people regarding incomes, housing, medical care and other goods and services. Public policy is being used to disperse population and change patterns of economic development.

In each country different types of rural tourism industry were developed and due to the lack of research in the field we decided to investigate which differences and similarities we could find. We concluded that there were forty-two differences between the two countries and twenty-seven similarities. These differences and similarities were classified into four different categories so as to be a starting point for further research in the future. The main difference was the way rural tourism is developed. In Greece it is associated with luxurious lodging houses or hotels which only provide rooms with village style furnishing. In Hungary rural tourism has a unique character and is more related to country life. Definitely, in both countries there are disadvantages such as short-length tourist period and the unconventional way of development. That unconventional way of development is

the basic reason why the local economy in both cases has not been reinforced as much as possible.

Rural communities should be provided with the chance to obtain the resources which can help them in tourism development. The developmental tools of tourism include research, resource guides, "how-to" guides from successful communities, case studies, workshops, conferences, and training for rural leaders. The process of tourism development must be defined in order to be clarified and explained to rural community leaders. Investing money on rural tourism is not enough for its development. The two countries should take the warning and adopt the efficient practices.

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