

Please cite this reference as:

Kastenholz, E. & Figueiredo, E. (2010). "Understanding the overall rural tourism experience for improved destination marketing" Communication presented at the CBTS - Consumer Behavior in Tourism Symposium 2010, Brunico, Italy, December 2010.

Understanding the overall rural tourism experience for improved destination marketing¹

Elisabeth Kastenholz

Elisabete Figueiredo

Research Unit GOVCOPP – University of Aveiro

Abstract

The tourist experience has received increasing attention in the context of destination planning and marketing, being recognized as the central element of tourist demand and satisfaction (Stamboulis & Skayannis 2003; Ellis & Rossman, 2008). The understanding of this experience, its nature, features, dimensions and determinants, is therefore most important, requiring multiple and multi-disciplinary approaches of analysis.

Particularly, in the rural tourism context, where resources are scarce and need to be carefully allocated to contribute to a sustainable development of frequently fragile, isolated territories and communities, a strategic management of the tourism experience is desirable. In this context, from the point of view of both the market and the destination, 'rural features' of the territory and the community visited play a significant role in any tourism experience designated as 'rural' (Saxena *et al*, 2007). We additionally understand the relevance of its integration into a wider social, heritage and economic system, aiming at sustaining the rural cultural economy (Kneafsy, 2001) and at optimally managing the potentially powerful impacts that tourism may produce (Lane, 2009).

It is in this context that the authors present a conceptual discussion attempting to reveal the most relevant dimensions of the complex rural tourism experience, to diverse degrees and with distinct interests sought and lived by tourists, the rural destination community and local agents of tourism supply, as well as shaped by the specific geographical, natural and cultural tourism destination context.

The paper first discusses the term "overall tourism experience" and the relevance of its analysis in the context of destination marketing. Then, the concept is applied to the rural tourism context, specifically referring to the experience sought and lived "on site", at the rural destination. Three main dimensions of analysis are distinguished: focusing on the tourist, the hosts (both the population and local service providers) and the territorial context. Finally, the need of integrating the diverse features and stakeholders involved in providing the rural tourism experience is stressed, yielding a full comprehension of the complex and multifaceted phenomenon and a correspondingly improved capacity of its planning and managing in a sustainable destination marketing context.

Keywords: rural tourism, overall tourism experience, experience marketing, destination marketing, sustainability

¹ This paper was produced in the context of a 3 year research project financed by the *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia* (co-financed by *COMPETE*, *QREN* e *FEDER*), "The overall rural tourism experience and sustainable local community development" (PTDC/CS-GEO/104894/2008).