

Rural Development and Rural Tourism in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study rural development and rural tourism from the perspective of how Taiwan's rural development should cope with the development of rural tourism. The research methods adopted are based mainly on considerations of practical examples supported by a literature review and cross analysis. We start by stating the significance of rural villages and then move on to the content and functions of rural tourism. This is followed by a discussion with explanations of how rural development is important and complementary to rural tourism.

Finally this paper describes and comments on the current problems of rural tourism in Taiwan and proposes policies to promote rural tourism through rural development efforts such as creating rural attractiveness in terms of living and recreational value, reserving lands for public facilities and nature conservation, and coping with the needs of rural tourism development as Taiwan's economy continues booming.

Key words: rural development, rural tourism, rural policies, Taiwan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural development aims to create a long-term living environment of good quality outside an urban area. This development includes improvements in rural economy and living and recreational environment through appropriate planning, preparation and implementation of various policies and measures (Weiss, 1996).

Based on the objectives of rural development, agriculture remains vital for our existence by ensuring a supply of fresh food and wholesome nutrition as well as preserving the natural and cultural landscape and the diversity of rural life. The variety, nature, beauty and individuality of rural views make rural areas attractive. Along with the rise in national income and the increase in opportunities for holiday-making, rural diversity, naturalness and the charm of rural life have attracted urban dwellers to tour rural areas (Läpple, 1996).

The increase in leisure time and opportunities for taking a vacation are unique phenomena in a modern and affluent society. By engaging in various leisure and recreational activities, most people are released from their high-pressure working environment and routine lifestyle. Thus more and more urban dwellers are seeking the solace of nature. It is believed that rural villages are able to offer the respite that many urbanites desire. One of the main targets of rural development is sparking a new role for the rural areas by transforming rural villages into leisure and recreational paradises for the stressed-out urban population. In turn, there is an increasing dependence on the rural area that will help to boost the rural tourism industry (Liu, 1986).

On the other hand, rural tourism will also generate new income streams for rural people, such as fees derived from providing services such as tour transport and sightseeing as well as rental from farm stays and camping grounds. This

supplements the relatively lower income earned by rural people. Furthermore, the rise in tourist numbers in turn increases spending on farm produce, thus helping to develop a profitable market for the villages.

In recent years, with income levels rising in Taiwan and the government's concerted effort in developing the leisure industry in rural areas, the recreational role of the agricultural sector and rural villages has been given a great boost. At the same time, the general population can obviously enjoy better holiday alternatives (Liu, 1999).

This paper will start by stating the significance of rural villages and then the content and functions of rural tourism. After that it will discuss and explain how rural development is important and complementary to all these developments. Finally this paper describes and makes comments on current problems of rural tourism in Taiwan and proposes policies to promote rural tourism through rural development efforts.

2. RURAL VILLAGE AND RURAL TOURISM

2.1 Rural Village

2.1.1 Definition

Before World War II, the society and economies of Taiwan's rural areas were mainly agriculture- and forestry-oriented. The living and cultural conditions and natural environment were largely dependent on agricultural production. In such a social structure, which is completely different from that of urban areas, rural development was closely related to the change of agricultural structure.

After World War II, the advancement of biological technologies brought dramatic changes to agricultural structure. While the number of farmers declined, the production output and efficiency increased. In 1952, a farmer could produce a yield enough to support 4.95 people. According to Taiwan Agricultural Yearbook 2008, now a farmer's production can feed more than 44 people. The output and productivity has increased almost 10 times. Now there are 834,814 farm families of different scales, production and organizational structure in Taiwan. They cover 825,947 hectares of farmland, when it includes forestry, which is approximately 60% of Taiwan's territory. The statistics show the value of agriculture, which produces high quality grains, plays an important role in natural resources and landscape conservation, and makes a great contribution to preserving a natural living base and diversifying culture and recreation.

In order to clarify the terms in this paper, several important definitions are set forth as below:

- (1) Rural refers to the agriculture- and forestry-oriented rural area including fields for production and villages for living. The German scholar Wilhelm Landzettel has said that rural areas should include villages for living and its surroundings, which are fields for production and for nature and landscape preservation purposes. The village to its surroundings is like the yolk to an egg white. Even a hungry man won't have an appetite for an egg without egg white because it is

not what an egg is made of (Läpple, 1996). It is obvious that a village and its surroundings should be integrated and considered as a complete unit of rural area.

- (2) Rural development is a part of territorial planning. It includes all appropriate plans and measures to protect and improve the economic, living and recreational conditions of rural areas in order to provide a long-term good quality living environment outside urban areas (Weiss, 1996).
- (3) Village renewal is an important strategy of rural development. It involves various policies and strategies applied to the development of rural communities and residence patterns in order to improve the production conditions and living environment for village residents. In the meantime, it also focuses on village culture and traditions and intends to maintain the unique village characteristics (Liu, 2001).

2.1.2 Functions

A traditional rural village provides a place for farming and living. Villages are the residential units in which buildings are located side by side. In the early days when a rural community was formed, the village structures and housing patterns were arranged by agricultural production activities.

With social and economic development and the change of agrarian structure, the role and structure of the rural village has changed. The rural village not only provides a place for agricultural production and for farmers to live but also furnishes other industries and other non-farmers with space.

Villages not only produce foods and raw materials, but also offer and “provide” beautiful landscapes and natural environments as well as conserving natural resources and landscapes. In addition, with the increase in national income and vacation time, the diverse beautiful natural landscape attracts urban people to spend their vacations in rural areas. Therefore, it is useful to have a reserve of nature and environmental protection, as well as the heritage of rural culture (Läpple, 1996).

It is very important for a rural villages to adapt itself to the changes of agricultural structure and to satisfy social needs. It includes: (Magel, 1997; Liu, 2000).

(1) Production of Abundant Food

In the future the primary function of rural areas should be producing good quality grains and living materials which are vital for our daily lives.

(2) Protecting all Kinds of Animals and Plants, Preservation of a Natural LivingBase

The elements of nature such as water, air, soil and all kinds of flora and fauna as well as beautiful landscapes, which exist in rural areas, provide an essential and indispensable basis for human being’s survival and natural life-support system.

(3) Heritage and Creation of Rural Culture

The activities of agriculture, forestry and fisheries and rural life (such as events, festivals and religious activities) all have cultural meaning. Rural monuments as well as many historical buildings and relics have rural features and a history, which both inherit and create cultural assets.

(4) Creating Rural Appeal in Living, Economy and Recreation

Rural areas supply us with leisure and a relaxing living space through their rich and diversifying nature and culture. The tourism value of a village is also appreciated for its diverse, unique and beautiful nature and landscape (Figure 1).

Based on the multi-functionality of rural areas, the roles of agriculture and rural villages have to be adjusted in line with the development of rural tourism and the goals of rural development. The goal is to create a beautiful rural environment, improve the conditions and quality of rural living and infuse vitality into rural area to increase its attractiveness, while in the meantime protect its traditions and unique style during social economic growth, thus helping to change public perception of these areas as under-developed and backward. With such efforts, we are able to transform the countryside into desirable places for living and leisure.

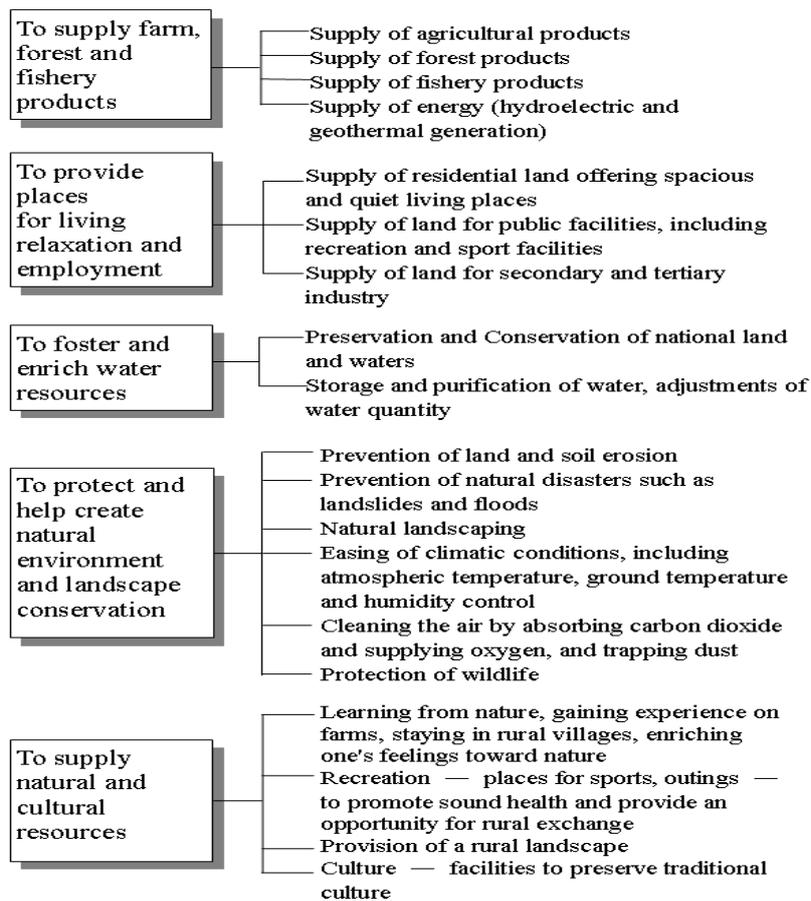


Figure 1. The Important Functions of Rural Areas.

2.1.3 Rural features

Rural features and rural characteristics are an abstract and subjective concept as everyone may already have an idea or an image in his or her mind, but finds it difficult to express explicitly or arrive at a consensus. Even so, there are some key components of rural features and rural characteristics, which can be described as follows (Schlagheck, 2000; Liu, 2002).

- a. Views of the villages.
- b. Village surroundings.
- c. Village passages.
- d. Village streets.
- e. Views from the rooftop (roof landscape).
- f. Village spaces.
- g. Village buildings.
- h. Frontal views and exteriors of farm houses.
- i. Natural landscapes of rural villages.
- j. Village construction materials and goods.

Among those listed, rural architectures and traditional residential houses are considered the most unique and indigenous rural characteristics as they blend better with their surrounding environment. They are artificial structures closely tied to the local rural culture.

As can be seen, further understanding of rural features and their unique characteristics is one of the priority tasks of village renewal and rural development. There are three areas of concern regarding rural features and characteristics:

(1) Natural Landscape

- 1.1 Rural Green Zone: crop fields, orchards, tea plantations, terraces and other green areas for cultivation purposes, garden parks, nature eco-system conservation areas, all other types of nature areas.
- 1.2 Rural Blue Belt: rivers, canals, lakes, drains, waterfalls, ponds and so on.
- 1.3 Flora and Fauna: natural forest areas, forest plantations, grasslands, wetlands, rare plants or indigenous plants, mammals, reptiles, insects (butterflies, fireflies, dragonflies), aquatic animals, birds and so on.
- 1.4 Natural Phenomena: caves, cliffs, canyons, snow, sunsets, cloud formations, fogs, moon and stars, seasonal changes.

(2) Cultural Landscape

- 2.1 Local traditional cultural assets: traditional handiwork (such as carving, architecture, traditional handicrafts), folk songs, puppet shows, folk parade display and other special indigenous culture, customs, arts, symbols and images.
- 2.2 Buildings and public facilities: rural houses, traditional residences and artificial structures such as pavilions, lofts, temples, churches, schools, bridges, tunnels and so on.
- 2.3 Major landmarks: local symbolic structures such as memorials, city gates, public artworks, fountains and so on.
- 2.4 Roads, passages, dams and so on. Open spaces in garden parks and plazas.

(3) Others

The following rural activities belong to an important part of the rural cultural

landscape.

3.1 Local folk festivals and celebrations: temple rituals, lantern festival, local temple assembly, sky lantern celebrations, indigenous rites and rituals, mid-autumn festival, dragon boat races and so on.

3.2 Leisure and recreation activities: farm fairs, night bazaars, traditional and farmers' markets, cultural activities, weekend flower markets and so on.

Rural characteristics and the lifestyle of the indigenous population will undergo a myriad of changes in tandem with changes in the social economic and natural environments. The artistic, cultural, scenic and recreational values of rural villages ensure the protection of the ecological balance and conservation of the landscape. The breathtaking scenery, fresh air, pure water sources, unique cultural assets and leisure resources available in the rural area are huge attractions to people who desire such physical elements, and a major draw to return to nature and countryside.

Hence, it is of utmost importance to discover ways to integrate the special quality of rural areas (landscape resources and culture) into the development of rural tourism so as to inject vitality into the rural villages.

2.2 Leisure Agriculture and Rural Tourism

2.2.1 Leisure agriculture

In order to improve farmers' income the government of Taiwan has adopted the development of leisure farms and leisure agriculture as important strategies to overcome the agricultural production and marketing problems due to joining the WTO. In the early phase the strategy focused on developing tourism orchards, leisure farms and leisure agriculture. Later on, in an effort to promote the transformation of agriculture and rural villages, Taiwan was aggressively transferred to developing rural tourism.

What is the exact difference between leisure agriculture and rural tourism?

According to the Taiwan Agricultural Development Act (ADA): "Agricultural activities aiming to provide recreational resources for citizens and to enhance citizens' appreciation of agriculture and farming villages through the use of pastoral landscapes, natural ecosystems, and environmental resources; and through the integration of farming, forestry, fishery and livestock production, farming activities, rural culture and peasant lifestyles" (ADA-Article 3-5).

The policy of leisure agriculture in Taiwan emphasizes the use of farm land for leisure purposes. Farm operations transferred from pure production to leisure. Important leisure items on these farms include tourism, recreation, resting, education, eco-acquisition, providing food and beverages, as well as providing living quarters. Tourists enjoy their leisure and recreation through exercising and experiencing these items and related activities (Liu, 2002).

In other words, leisure agriculture is an integrated operation system comprising production, lifestyle and eco-system. It is also an agricultural enterprise management system consisting of production and supply, processing and recreational services spanning the primary, secondary and tertiary industries. It is a business model that fuses the environment, cultural and recreational elements with the main framework of agriculture activities, while providing a leisure alternative

that is close to nature and the countryside. The major objectives are to use agricultural resources extensively, to increase farmers' income effectively, and to improve rural economy actively (Liu, 2002).

2.2.2 Rural tourism

The term "rural tourism" has a wide range and covers all the leisure and recreational activities in the rural areas (Liu, 1999). According to Tsai (Tsai, 2007) "the content of rural tourism covers tourism in orchards, farm, culture, life, scenic areas, religious activities, food and air in rural areas." It comprises rural production, living and ecology, including production: agricultural-activity oriented tourism (agro-tourism or leisure agriculture); living: culture-based activities (cultural and historical tourism, or museum tourism), and ecological: nature-oriented recreation activities (nature tourism, agro-tourism, green tourism or eco-tourism).

It can be concluded that rural tourism is also a kind of lifestyle and a critical part of the rural leisure industry. In order to develop rural tourism, besides the maintenance of the natural eco-systems and landscape as well as the preservation of rural features and culture, recreational facilities in the villages should be improved and upgraded so as to increase their attractiveness and meet the needs of holidaymakers. This is the key to the promotion of rural tourism, helping to increase employment opportunities and creating new income streams for the farmers.

For that reason, the notion of rural tourism covers not only tourism on the farm (leisure agriculture), but also any tourist activity in rural areas that is known to be a way of enjoying rural life, enjoying beautiful rural scenery and maintaining rural prosperity and environmental quality (Liu, 2000).

Therefore, rural tourism is the utilization and integration of the unique quality and rich resources of the rural environment (including natural resources, the environment and landscape of rural villages, such as farmland and forestry, lakes and mountains); the diversity of agriculture production (for instance, farm production, harvesting fruits, gardening, venues for forestry, livestock rearing and fishery operations); the local rural culture (such as rural buildings, historical architecture, cultural relics, temples and indigenous cultural practices and customs); the elegant rural landscape (village architecture, gathering sites, plazas and squares, streets, rivers, scenes of farmers working in the field, natural landscapes and environments) and so on. It offers city dwellers or travelers a place to relax and enjoy the greenery of the countryside, and the chance to enjoy the simple joys of rural living.

Rural tourism is not merely organizing sightseeing trips to farms or orchards, or even just developing agriculture tourist sites or jungle theme parks and leisure farms. It is an approach to integrating the blueprint of rural development in a bid to create a graceful and comfortable living environment while ensuring the preservation of nature and landscapes, and protecting the originality and uniqueness of the area. This would transform the rural village into a sought-after holiday destination, in turn fuelling the economic growth of the rural area. Rural tourism aims also to improve the agrarian structure, fully utilize and preserve nature and cultural resources, provide the population with a chance to experience rural living, increase employment opportunities and raise the income of farmers. All these will

help to promote the overall growth of the rural areas (Liu, 1999).

The variety of farms, the different cultivation methods, the livestock rearing and crop production that shifts with the seasons, as well as specialty farmers, all contribute to the diversity of agriculture activities, weaving a rich rural landscape that is constantly changing.

In a modern society, the agriculture and rural village contribute significantly to the overall economy by preserving the vibrancy and liveliness of the rural landscapes. Hence rural tourism and leisure agriculture should take this into consideration and proactively support the functions of these areas, helping to ensure cultural integrity, nature conservation and landscape protection. Its development should proceed on the foundation and framework of the overall growth of rural areas.

2.2.3 Functions

As mentioned previously, rural tourism is a combination of agriculture activities, rural culture and recreation service, and bears several functions including economic, social, educational, environmental, recreational, therapeutic, cultural heritage and so on. From the supply (rural village) and demand (rural tourists) point of views, the impacts and functions of rural tourism can be summarized and shown in Table 1. Details are as follows (Liu, 2002).

- a. Economic function: to increase employment opportunities in the rural areas, and to improve rural income and create a flourishing rural economy.
- b. Social function: to promote interactions among urban dwellers, rural villagers and the rural areas, further expand social networks of farmers, and narrow the urban-rural gap as well as elevate the quality of life in rural areas.
- c. Educational function: to provide opportunities for urban dwellers to understand agriculture, educate them in the process of crop cultivation and livestock rearing, experience rural living and appreciate its culture and eco-systems.
- d. Environmental function: to improve and upgrade the quality of the rural environment, as well as to protect its natural landscape and eco-systems.
- e. Recreational function: to provide public places for leisure activities and rural leisure tours.
- f. Therapeutic function: to provide public areas for leisure activities allowing close encounters with the natural landscapes and eco-systems in the rural areas, helping to relieve daily stress of work, achieving peace of mind and body.
- g. Cultural heritage: to ensure the preservation and continuity of the unique lifestyles, culture and folk arts of rural villages. At the same time, rural tourism helps to create unique rural culture and cultural assets.

3. RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY FOR RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Goals and Tasks of Rural Development

Rural development involves various policies and methods to improve production conditions and the living environment for village residents. It is also a

process of agricultural development and economic growth, rural infrastructure improvement, residential area reconstruction, and living improvement that meets village residents' various requirements for change in society and the rural village (Läpple, 1996; Liu, 2001).

Table 1. *The impacts and functions of rural tourism*

	Rural village (Supplier)	Tourists (Consumer)
Supply and Demand	Rural features (Natural landscapes and Cultural landscapes)	Enjoying rural landscape Experiencing rural living Achieving peace of mind and body
	Impacts and Functions of Rural Tourism	Social functions Educational functions Environmental functions Recreational functions Cultural heritages
		Therapeutic functions Cultural heritages

The main objective of rural development is to narrow the developmental gap between the rural and urban areas by improving the working conditions and living environment of the villages, ensuring that the rural population enjoy similar privileges and quality of life as their city counterparts (Magel, 1997).

Along with the change of rural functions, the goals of rural development have to be adjusted properly to infuse vitality into rural areas and at the same time, during social economic growth, protect its traditions and unique styles. In addition, rural development helps to reinforce conservation efforts towards nature and the eco-systems, highlighting the precious status of the natural resources and unique scenery of the countryside. Efforts to preserve the integrity of ancient cultural relics and buildings will further enhance the attractiveness of these areas and increase the number of visitors vacationing there.

Therefore the important goals and tasks of rural development include:

- (1) Creating rural economic strength and improving the working conditions and living environment for rural inhabitants so as to promote a prosperous rural economy and meet the needs of agricultural development.
- (2) Preserving and maintaining traditional rural features and unique styles, and maintaining vitality in the process of modernization and improvement of living conditions.
- (3) Protecting natural landscapes and ecological environments as well as meeting the needs of rural tourism.

3.2 Problems of Rural Tourism in Taiwan and Principles of Rural Tourism Development

3.2.1 Problems of rural tourism in Taiwan

As mentioned earlier, rural tourism is the integration of agriculture activities, graceful rural space and rural cultural and natural elements to achieve a vacation destination that offers great recreational value.

By encouraging citizens to become more involved with rural villages and to experience their lifestyle, interest and support for the promotion of local rural industry will increase. This will also create new income revenue for villagers, helping to achieve the goal of a prosperous rural development.

Rural tourism is a new form of rural industry that has emerged in Taiwan in recent years. This trend is mainly a culmination of factors such as drastic changes in the agrarian structure, the transformation of urbanized society, an increasingly affluent population, shifts in consumer patterns, increases in leisure time and improvement in traffic. At the same time, it is also an attempt at breaking the bottleneck experienced by the agriculture industry, boosting its transformation into a novel and more vibrant industry offering greater job opportunities. Along with this development, Taiwan's rural tourism has also advanced significantly.

However, Taiwan certainly has the following problems for the development of rural tourism:

- (1) A lack of overall rural development policy has existed in most rural areas in Taiwan for a long time (Liu, 2005). The coexistence of newly built modern houses and old houses makes a disorganized inharmonious outlook and ruins the rural landscape and rural architectural style. The results from unplanned and unlimited development in the rural areas cause a chaotic use of land, deployment of public facilities and village outlook (Liu, 2008). In general, the rural community scenery is not very beautiful (Tsai, 2007). Old rural communities are gradually losing their traditional features, vitality and attractiveness.
- (2) Because of the effect of land use conflicts, rural areas are short of leisure and tourism resources and natural landscapes to attract tourist. Land use conflicts exist between the agricultural sector and others, as well as between agricultural land use and leisure purposes. Along with the development of leisure agriculture, farm land converted to the use of leisure and recreation and more farmers changed their occupations to tourism and related services. Because of the scarcity of land resources, the reduction of precious farmland would lead to the deterioration of the farming landscape, and seriously damage the natural environment. Our rural area is facing the problems of losing its tourism value. What is more, it is also not difficult to find plenty of conflicting articles in the Taiwan Agricultural Development Act concerning agricultural land use (Liu, 2008), particularly the permission of farmhouses built on farmland contradicts the policy of agricultural land for farming, and endangers the environment and landscape. Such a degradation of the rural landscape and environment will have a significant negative impact on rural tourism development.
- (3) As mentioned above, old rural communities in Taiwan look confused and disordered due to lack of long-term rural development policy. Rural tourists need all kinds of essential recreational facilities and services, especially the safety of travel and recreation. The original rural villages were old, declining and suffering from under-development leading to inadequacies in infrastructure, insufficient leisure and tourism facilities and a backward living environment (Liu, 2005). This brings additional significance to village renewal. If rural areas are gradually losing their traditional features, vitality and attractiveness, there is

no value for rural tourism.

3.2.2 Principles of rural tourism development

Hence, it is critical for rural development to aggressively target efforts at creating conducive conditions for rural tourism and the leisure industry. For instance, vibrant and productive agricultural activities, lovely natural landscape and resources, great living environments that offer service and tourism-oriented infrastructure facilities, as well as the preservation of local heritage and cultural practices, and so on. Details are as follows:

3.2.2.1 Development of rural tourism is based on reinforcement of planning and development of rural villages

How to invigorate rural villages and preserve their traditional flavors and unique styles has become an important topic for rural development. Efforts should be made to reinforce the construction of public utilities, renovate village residences, improve the working conditions and living environment of villagers, preserve rural ecology and scenery, meet the needs of developing tourism activities in rural villages, and set up facilities for tourism and leisure activities to create a beautiful environment for rural tourism and attractions in the rural village.

At the same time cultural relics and ancient remains in the rural village should be protected, rural traditions should be kept and buildings of historic value renovated to preserve natural resources and maintain rural scenery and flavors in order to reveal unique rural features and their significance in prolonging innate culture. Such re-creation of the rural attraction in residence and leisure can bring society closer to the rural village, and also reach the goal of territorial planning to balance the development between urban and rural life. It is the real meaning of “rural development serves both city life and rural life” (Liu, 2005).

3.2.2.2 Protection of rural cultural assets is the basis of the attraction of villages

Rural development should retain the traditional style and unique characteristics of the rural village. The most valuable assets for rural tourism are qualities such as the diversity and uniqueness of the agriculture activities, the naturally breathtaking landscape and environment, the cultural relics and the complexity and artistic value of rural buildings, the simplicity and authenticity of the culture and the awesome eco-system consisting of wildlife, flora and indigenous animals. These are what attract the urban population to the rural areas; hence the process of rural development and village renewal should be based on the conservation principles of “preserving the traditional, spearheading trends.”

Therefore, rural development should be reinforced according to the unique characteristics and style of individual regions, and through the village renewal and construction of residential areas, help farmers to create simple, clean and indigenous farm accommodation that can offer tourists a chance to enjoy the surrounding countryside.

The development of rural tourism not only provides better holiday choices offering serenity, comfort and joy of rural living, but also brings in tourists dollars that will revive the rural economy and raise farmers’ incomes.

3.3 Policy for Rural Tourism Development

As mentioned earlier, the uniqueness and attraction of rural villages is central to the development of rural tourism or the rural leisure industry. Many of the cultural relics and heritage buildings possess great historical value and are an integral part of village life, deserving conservation.

The essence of rural living lies in its simple lifestyle, hard working and contented people, and the embodiment of peace and compassion within the community. These are rare characteristics that deserve to be propagated in an increasingly commercialized and industrialized society. In addition, the naturally beautiful environment and landscape created by open farmlands and fields are ideal backdrops for a unique and more humane lifestyle, compared to urban living.

Hence, in tandem with these developmental trends, the government should adjust village renewal to accommodate changes effectively, giving rural tourism the boost it needs. Details are as follows (Weiss, 1996; Magel, 1997):

3.3.1 Strengthen investments in rural public service sectors and conservation efforts for cultural relics and buildings

Efforts to bolster the public service sector in the villages should be strengthened. This is an important step towards building a better rural environment, providing convenient and quality services to the local populations as well as allowing tourists to enjoy a getaway to the countryside.

It is critical that more investments are poured into the construction of rural public services and recreational facilities for tourists, for example, recreational and sports activity centers, venues for ball games, swimming pools, outdoor camping sites (the so call “open air hotels”), children’s playground, fishing, wading pools and so on. This would increase the fun and excitement quotient of rural tourism and offer urban travelers an opportunity to embrace countryside living.

Cultural relics and buildings in villages are important cultural assets, and symbolize historical milestones of rural development. They should be preserved and protected. By endeavoring to protect the cultural assets of the villages and highlighting their indigenous roots and heritage, emotional ties are strengthened and becomes the social glue that holds the community together.

Besides focusing on preserving the landscape, scenery and nature, the planning of infrastructure and public roads such as pedestrian walks and bicycle lanes should not destroy the original look and special characteristics of the place. This includes retaining the native flora and trees species that are huge attractions for tourists.

By the same measures, as required by the development of recreational areas in rural villages, houses are reconstructed; recreational facilities are added to create a nice and attractive leisure environment. Meanwhile, rural relics and historical sites are preserved, traditional or historical buildings are kept, natural resources are protected, and landscape and rural features are conserved so as to retain the unique rural style and continue their own cultural meaning. Only in this way can villages become an attraction for living and tourism.

3.3.2 Village renewal and reconstruction of village residences

In an effort to promote modernization of rural villages and offer tourists the comfort of essential public services and facilities, village renewal should consider both the needs of the community social system and the tourists. On one hand, it

should provide a blueprint for rural development while pushing for the renewal and reconstruction of the buildings and residences. The aim is to retain the native rural ambience, while improving living conditions and providing tourists a clean and comfortable holiday destination.

One of the approaches to village renewal, while retaining the traditional heritage, is to imbue old but historical buildings with new roles and functions. That is, the renovation of village residences can change the purposes of rural buildings for re-utilization so as to endow old and historic houses with new vitality and fresh functions as well as maintain and preserve cultural relics and scenery in the rural village.

With the development of rural tourism, farmers can be persuaded to convert extra rooms or repair and remodel agricultural buildings into accommodation for tourists, meeting the needs of urban tourists who would like to experience a “farm stay” holiday. This generates new revenue for the farmers. With services ranging from sports venues, camping sites to rental of farm houses, village accommodation, cruise and fishing boats, horses and ox carts, the tourists will not be disappointed.

It is essential to remember that rural tourism activities today require a considerable initial investment to satisfy tourists’ demands and meet modern standards of comfort and safety.

3.3.3 Thorough and proper planning of land use

Another important point is that “farm stay” or accommodation alone is not enough to attract urban tourists. It should be accompanied by activities which tourists will enjoy, and be part of an attractive nature and environment.

Air, water, soil, grasslands and beautiful landscapes are the precious resources offered by agriculture and rural villages. Proper and thorough land use planning is required to avoid the pollution and the destruction of the environment and natural landscape. This relies on regulating the use of agricultural land by different departments and preventing unhealthy competition for land, as well as stopping unregulated and chaotic expansion of land for housing and industrial use. This would stamp out the problems of pollution and prevent destruction of production conditions and living environment in the rural village (Liu, 2008).

The goal of transforming rural villages into attractive tourist destinations for urbanites can only be possible with the proper maintenance and protection of the rural features, such as natural and agricultural resources, beautiful landscape and eco-systems. This goal is achieved through proper land use planning, green efforts and landscape planning within the rural village, as well as the maintenance and preservation of green zones and green belts in peripheral areas. On one hand, green belts such as forest, woods and open plains are kept as oases for wildlife and plants, while conserving water and soil resources.

On the other hand, efforts should be targeted at treating the rivers and cultivating trees and plants, achieving a natural water system and green environment. In the end, these efforts will result in a flourishing and vibrant rural landscape, comprising rural scenery and villages, ultimately unlocking the great tourism value in rural areas.

3.3.4 Summary: creating rural attractiveness in terms of living and recreation value

With social and economic growth and agricultural structure changing, the role of the rural area has many functions. Agriculture and the rural village are not only the food supply and raw material production process, but also they offer a beautiful landscape and natural environment. The variety, nature, beauty and individuality of rural views make rural areas attractive. Rural areas are also the vacation places which can provide urban populations with recreation and relaxation. It is so useful to have a nature reserve and environmental protection. As a result, it is an important task for rural development by means of village renewal to infuse vitality into rural areas while at the same time providing protection for its traditions and unique style. If we can encourage people to travel to rural villages and to “spend their vacations on farms” to support agricultural amusement, farmers will have another source of income.

Through comprehensive rural development planning and village renewal, we could establish a basic public facility to improve rural working and living conditions. Task focuses range from building and renewing houses to establishing basic public and recreation facilities in villages, from the construction of village streets, alleys, sports ground, children’s playground, parks and green fields, to transportation infrastructure and quality improvement with special consideration for the nature of rural areas, as well as public activities on environmental protection, etc.

In addition, in order to meet the demands of developing rural tourism, we should renew and reuse tradition houses and improve leisure and recreation facilities. Such activities create beautiful relaxing conditions in rural areas. In the meantime, these actions will show the unique rural style and the meaningfulness of continuing rural culture. Actions such as these will re-create rural attractiveness by providing a tourist environment. This will make the whole of society more dependent on rural areas, and strengthen farmers’ recognition and sense of belonging to their villages.

To sum up, the main contents of village renewal are as follows:

- (1) Generation of vitality to the village.
- (2) Preservation of historic sites and rural features and style.
- (3) Renewal of buildings, new use for old houses and modernization.
- (4) Expansion of land for construction (reservation of land for village development).
- (5) Development of agriculture and other local rural industries.
- (6) Improvement of traffic.
- (7) Construction of infrastructure, public and private facilities.
- (8) Beautification of park, green land, plaza, natural waterways and rivers.
- (9) Leisure, recreation and relaxation.
- (10) Conservation of natural resources, ecological environments and the landscape.

4. CONCLUSION

For urbanites living in a highly industrialized society, facing a highly-strung lifestyle, hectic work pace and pressure, the desire for more frequent breaks and relaxation is even more compelling. They want to get away from the hustle and

bustle, to find a place to help them de-stress and to recharge.

Consequently, the desire to seek out nature and recreational activities has grown stronger, especially with higher incomes, convenient traffic and longer leisure time. Opportunities for vacations are also abundant. The advent of rural tourism is timely as it matches the growing trend in tourism, and rural villages are excellent destinations for urbanites to spend their vacation and take a well-deserved break.

With social and economic development and the rapid change of agricultural structure, the roles and functions of rural villages have changed. It has become a challenge to rural development to create economic, residential, recreational and tourism values and attractions for rural villages and to make rural areas an attractive place to live.

The rural area is an excellent choice not only because it enjoys a mild climate, unique geographical conditions, beautiful landscape and the unique rural features and traditional culture, but also due to the concerted efforts to upgrade the natural environment, recreational facilities and public service offerings.

On one hand, we should work on preserving the eco-system and protecting our natural resources – air, water, soil, grasslands and beautiful natural landscape as well as scenes of agriculture cultivation, to attract tourists. But on the other hand, we should push aggressively for village renewal and the remodeling of rural residences as a means of providing comfortable and indigenous accommodation for tourists. Coordinating with rural tourism, efforts should be made to encourage people to “spend holidays on the farms” during their free time. This can provide farmers with another channel for making money.

The pursuit of an “affluent” and “natural” rural area is one of the key goals of Taiwan’s agricultural development. Hence, rural development has to integrate both the preservation of villages and the development of rural tourism. This increase in dependence of city dwellers on agriculture and rural areas will create vacations for tourists and raise their spending in rural areas, in turn carving out a profitable market that helps to achieve the dual purposes of agriculture development and a prospering rural economy.

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