

## Chapter 3

# Rural Tourism Fostering Welfare Through Sustainable Development: A Conceptual Approach

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### ABSTRACT

*In the past decade, we could see a myriad of efforts in fostering rural development. Two critical elements in travel, tourism, and leisure activities are the traveler's wellbeing and resident's welfare, which are inherent factors of rural tourism. Despite the importance of rural areas to tourism development, the focus of the studies on wellbeing usually is resident or employee oriented. There is a lack of inquiries trying to understand the relationship between rural tourism and welfare on tourism. In this sense, this study aims to connect the topics on welfare and tourism in rural areas to provide a theoretical starting point for future studies. The authors unravel essential elements in the pursuit of enhancing tourist's welfare on rural tourism by providing a visual conceptual model that provides guidelines for tourism stakeholders to enhance tourists' welfare while mitigating negative crisis impacts. They expose the central elements of the graphical model and the actions required to enhance welfare on rural tourism as well as their interrelationships.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the past decade, we could see a myriad of efforts in fostering rural development (United Nations [UN], 2016). These guidelines are mirrored in tourism activities since 2020 was labelled as the International Year of Tourism and rural development (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2020a) and with initiatives such as the ‘rural tourism competition’ that seeks to source new startups and entrepreneurs that advance the contribution of tourism to rural development and support recovery (UNWTO, 2020b).

Two critical elements in travel, tourism, and leisure activities (Filimonau et al., 2017) are the traveller’s wellbeing (Mayer et al., 2019) and resident’s welfare (An & Alarcón, 2020; Bramwell, 2009), which are inherent factors of rural tourism (Sharpley & Jepsen, 2011). These two particularities are more intense and necessary in current times since the global mobility restrictions (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2021) caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (Sigala, 2020). This pandemic generated several negative social (e.g., xenophobia [Kock et al., 2020]), economic (e.g., an increase of extreme poverty [World Bank, 2020]) and personal impacts on society (e.g., despair; tension, panic, stress, crying, nervousness, agony, to name a few (See Mayer & Coelho [2021] for a detailed study), and it is changing tourist’s and communities’ psyches perhaps towards a “new equilibrium” (Kock et al., 2020, p. 1).

Despite this tourist’s psychosomatic swift change and the importance of rural areas to tourism development, the focus of the studies on wellbeing applied to rural tourism usually is resident’s (Boukas, 2019; Wang et al., 2021) or employees oriented (Xia et al., 2020). There is a lack of inquiries trying to understand the relationship between rural tourism and welfare on tourism, and this deficiency is even more prominent when it comes to search this theme under the sustainability lens, which appears to be one of the dominant paradigms in tourism research currently (Moyle et al., 2020; Ruhanen et al., 2015). In this sense, this study aims to connect the topics on welfare and tourism in rural areas to provide a theoretical starting point for future studies. We unravel essential elements in the pursuit of enhancing tourist’s welfare on rural tourism by providing a visual conceptual model that provides guidelines for tourism stakeholders to enhance tourists’ welfare while mitigating negative crisis impacts.

## **WELFARE TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA**

The term welfare is used in numerous disciplines with several connotations (Bergson, 1954) and constantly applied as a synonym for ‘utility’, ‘satisfaction’, ‘happiness’ or ‘preference’ (Brouwer et al., 2008). Partly of this polysemy is that the term’s usage always has a “normative political dimension that makes it difficult to derive a

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