

Chapter 21

The Contribution of Green Tourist Development on Sustainability and Entrepreneurship in the Rural Areas of Greece

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how green tourism initiatives contribute to sustainable development and entrepreneurial growth in rural Greek communities based on secondary data and case studies analysis. Overall, by promoting environmentally friendly practices, green tourism minimizes ecological footprints and conserves natural resources, ensuring the long-term viability of local ecosystems. Entrepreneurship in green tourism manifests through the establishment of small businesses, such as eco-lodges, farm-to-table restaurants, and adventure tourism services, which capitalize on rural areas' unique natural and cultural assets. These ventures stimulate local economies by retaining profits within the community and reducing economic leakage. The multiplier effects of green tourism extend to infrastructure development, improving transportation, communication, and public amenities, which benefit both residents and visitors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global shift towards sustainable practices has affected many industries, particularly tourism (Brooks et al, 2023). As one of the world's largest industries, tourism substantially impacts local economies, environments, and cultures. While mass tourism often results in environmental degradation, cultural dilution, and economic inequality, the rise of green or sustainable tourism has presented an alternative, more balanced approach (Zhao et al, 2024). Green tourism emphasizes environmental preservation, local culture, and economic empowerment, especially in rural areas (Al Fahmawee & Jawabreh, 2023).

Greece, with its stunning landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and diverse ecosystems, has long been a favorite destination for global travelers. However, much tourism focuses on urban centers like Athens and popular islands such as Mykonos and Santorini. In contrast, the rural regions of Greece, which comprise most of the country, have remained relatively underdeveloped regarding tourism infrastructure (Belias et al, 2023a). This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. With the rise of green tourism, rural Greece holds significant potential to benefit from sustainable tourism models that foster environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and local entrepreneurship (Tsekouropoulos et al, 2023). At this point, it is important to mention that Greece's economy relies on tourism since more than 25% of its GDP is directly or indirectly affected by tourism (Belias & Koustelos, 2024), while the personnel in Greece is regarded as quite skilled in relation with tourism (Belias et al, 2023b). Nonetheless, Greece is not only the 3S (sun, sand, sea), which is related to mass tourism, but it is also a country made from alpine mountains – making up 80% of the mainland – many points of interest which are capable of promoting alternative and sustainable tourism which is necessary to create income for those isolated communities but also to establish a balance between economic development on rural areas and the protection of their unique natural resources and their cultural heritage (Katemliadis & Papatheodorou, 2021). One way of ensuring this balance is through green tourism, which can ensure sustainability but also entrepreneurship (Belias et al., 2022). According to various authors (Belias & Koustelos, 2024; Papadaki, 2024; Dimitrios^a et al., 2022; Votsi et al, 2014), the concept of 'Green tourism,' as seen in cases like the Costa Navarino Hotel (Khodaiji & Christopoulou, 2020), refers to environmentally responsible tourism practices that reduce negative impacts on nature, support local economies, and enhance the preservation of cultural heritage. However, there is still a need to develop further research in terms of how it can contribute to rural areas of Greece.

This paper explores the contribution of green tourism development to sustainability and entrepreneurship in rural areas of Greece. The method employed in this research is a literature review, which synthesizes findings from relevant publications to produce a comprehensive analysis. In addition, several case studies are examined based on findings from the literature. The chapter is structured in two parts: the first part provides the theoretical background on Green tourism, while the second part presents case studies that show how Green tourism contributes to sustainability and entrepreneurship.

2.1 Definition of Green tourism

Green tourism, often synonymous with eco-tourism or sustainable tourism, refers to travel practices that emphasize the conservation of the natural environment, cultural heritage, and the well-being of local communities. This form of tourism is part of a broader movement towards sustainability in the tourism sector, responding to growing concerns over the negative impacts of mass tourism on the environment and local societies (Gutkevych, & Haba, 2020). Green tourism seeks to minimize environmental foot-

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