

# THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP'S ECONOMIC ADAPTATION TO THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT TOWARDS TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF DISADVANTAGED RURAL AREAS

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## Abstract

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The current study addresses the role that entrepreneurship can play in tourism development and sustainable economic growth in the most economically underprivileged rural regions. Rural economies face all the challenges discussed above, compounded by poor infrastructure and insufficient access to capital and serious out-migration. Here, tourism entrepreneurship is one of the main hopes for economic rejuvenation based on the utilization of rich local natural and cultural resources by setting up businesses that attract visitors, stimulate the job creation, and support regional heritage conservation (Mosiuuk et al., 2023; Mpofu, 2024). This paper will draw from empirical studies and theoretical perspectives on how rural tourism initiatives by entrepreneurs can be supported or become a driver of sustainable development in the context of finding a balance among economic growth, environmental concern, and social equity. Among others, the following questions will be explored: what effect entrepreneurship has on rural tourism sustainability, challenges and opportunities faced by rural entrepreneurs, and what role policy plays in facilitating tourism-based entrepreneurship. The findings show how entrepreneurship's economic adaptation can make a difference in disadvantaged rural areas and put forward recommendations for effective policy interventions that may contribute to the development of sustainable tourism, centered on and focused on local communities.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Rural, Tourism, Development, Sustainable

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship can have a strategic impact on the economic and social development of relatively disadvantaged rural areas, complementing

conventional development strategies with one that is especially capable of overcoming structural and resource limitations (Incio Chavesta et al., 2025; Mpofu, 2024; Taha et al., 2024). It was supposed to explain how tourism entrepreneurial ventures can

act as catalysts for sustainable development in rural areas, focusing on the potential for tourism to stimulate economic growth and preserve cultural heritage, leading to the improvement of the living conditions of local communities (AlAli et al., 2024; Jashari & Osmani, 2024). Being an alternative in the role of economic development, especially for underdeveloped regions with full natural and cultural resources, rural tourism is now in pursuit because these regions lack infrastructural support for large-scale industrial or agricultural production (Khan et al., 2012). Utilizing such resources through entrepreneurship will have many visitors seeking authentic, nature-based experiences, which at the same time will spur the creation of jobs and skill development among the local population. Typically, the less favored rural areas experience several socio-economic problems-like lack of access to capital, limited infrastructure, and serious out-migration-which interactively impede development prospects.

Against this backdrop, entrepreneurship related to tourism are adaptable and often low-cost ways of utilizing the already existing natural and cultural endowments of such regions to allow the evolution of sustainable economic activity (Anzules-Falcones et al., 2024). For example, eco-lodges, cultural heritage tourism, and local handicraft markets are tourism ventures of a small scale that can directly generate earnings while preserving the character and heritage of the region. Research evidence indicates that tourism in rural areas can provide a real alternative for economic diversification, especially if developed in accordance with the principles of sustainable development that safeguard the natural environment while consolidating the social fabric of the host community (Martini et al., 2020).

This paper tackles the gaps by investigating entrepreneurship, tourism, and sustainable development in rural areas with severe disadvantages. The paper consequently seeks to answer a set of questions, such as how does entrepreneurship contribute to the sustainability of rural tourism within the marginalized regions, which are the challenges that add to opportunities for the rural entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, and how could policy interventions influence the impact of tourism-based entrepreneurship on rural communities. This study, therefore, collates theoretical insights and empirical studies from diverse global contexts to undertake an integrated analysis of strategies, successes, and limitations of tourism-related entrepreneurship to pursue sustainable development goals at the rural level.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 examines the pertinent literature concerning entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, the economy, and rural development. Section 3 examines the methods utilized to undertake empirical research on the questions of the study. Section 4 discusses the empirical findings. Section 5 concludes with a discussion of the study's findings, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an intersection of entrepreneurship, tourism, and sustainable development that has gained considerable attention in literature for its potential and subsequent contribution to disadvantaged rural areas (Taha et al., 2024). These are indeed regions of poor economic growth with

a lack of basic infrastructure and high rates of outmigration, where more conventional mechanisms of development are particularly less effective (Anzules-Falcones et al., 2024). In such a context, tourism entrepreneurship becomes an adaptive strategy able to valorize cultural, natural, and human resources at the local level (Utami et al., 2023). This literature review is based on foundational theories and empirical studies in entrepreneurship, rural tourism, and sustainable development; thus, it lays the foundation for understanding how these elements interact to address challenges related to socioeconomic development in marginalized regions.

### 2.1. Entrepreneurship as a driver of rural development

Entrepreneurship has widely been described as a factor of transformation in economies, especially in areas where conventional ways of development have reached minimal levels (AlAli et al., 2024). Classic theories of entrepreneurship, from Schumpeter's "creative destruction" (Tuluze & Yurtkurto, 2015) the creation of new products or processes that destroy the existing market conditions and create new economic opportunities, frame entrepreneurs as innovators (Cooney & Licciardi, 2019). Of course, in rural areas, this phenomenon assumes a different dimension: the basis of new undertakings is played by local assets, such as cultural heritage, natural landscapes, or artisanal crafts. According to Cooney and Licciardi (2019), among others, it is underlined that, against other models, the entrepreneurial behavior in rural and disadvantaged areas is driven by necessity rather than by profit motives: necessity entrepreneurship is driven merely by survival motives. Social entrepreneurship is also important in rural tourism, whereby the entrepreneurship objective is not only economic return but also community well-being. Social entrepreneurs serve in a crucial role as "network architects" in building relationships from the local actor to other external stakeholders that promote sustainable tourism development (Mottiar et al., 2018). Such practices are reflected in the broader literature on social entrepreneurship, which emphasizes the duality of focus on social impact versus economic sustainability (Chatkaewnapanon & Lee, 2022). Many rural tourism social entrepreneurs are motivated through a commitment to cultural heritage preservation, environmental stewardship, and the improvement of local livelihoods in support of sustainable community development across many dimensions (Aleffi et al., 2020).

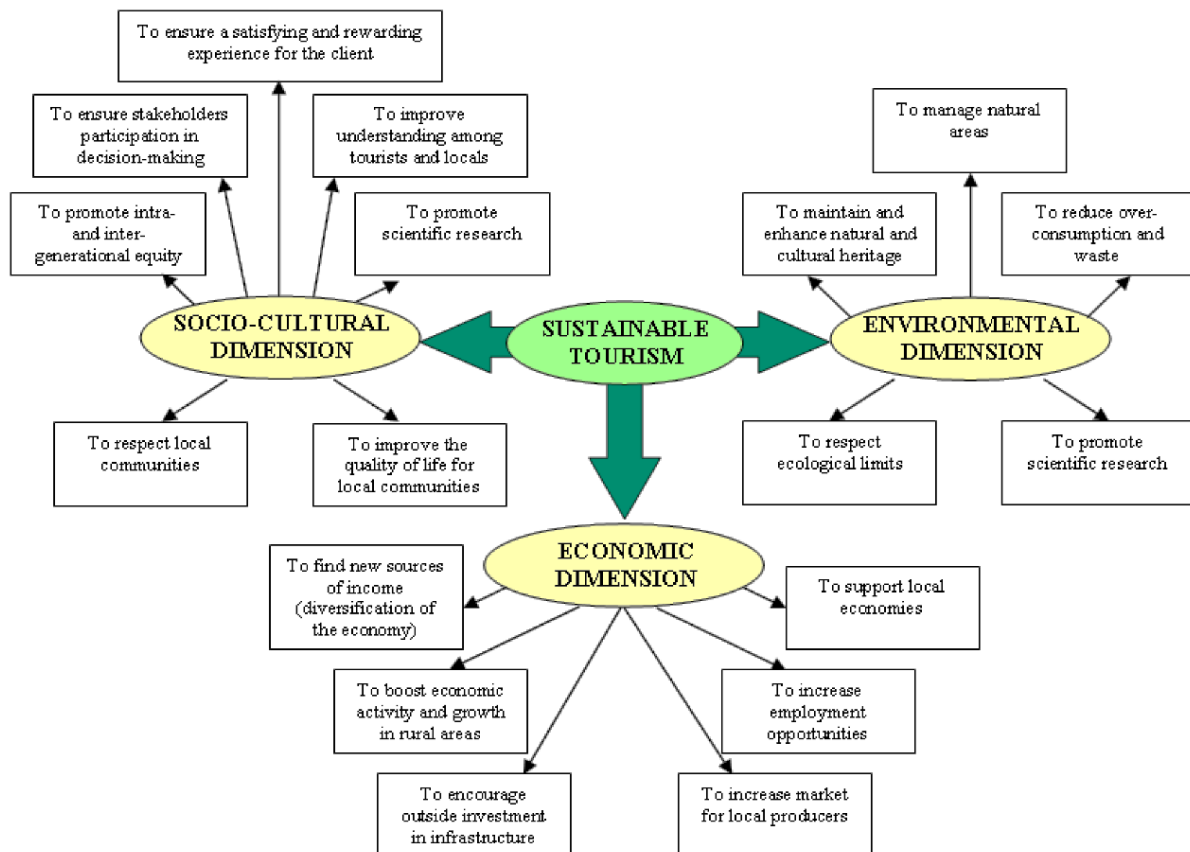
### 2.2. Sustainable tourism and rural revitalization

Precisely, sustainable tourism focuses on the integration of environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic viability, thus making rural areas with abundant natural and cultural resources an ideal fit. It is fast becoming one of the most effective tools for rural revitalization, particularly in less-developed countries where tourism is one of the few viable alternatives. Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) add that rural tourism is often based on clustering attractions and the development of tourism routes linking more localities, thereby causing synergistic

economic benefits and increased local involvement. The forms of sustainable rural tourism identified in the literature include eco-tourism, agritourism, and cultural tourism-all garnering various benefits (Zamfir & Corbos, 2015). Eco-tourism concerns travel in a very low-impact way and educates about the environment and is thus suitable for rural areas composed of sensitive ecosystems. Agritourism, on the other hand, capitalizes on agricultural activities for its attractions; these create direct economic linkages between tourism and the local farming

communities. In these models, community participation and empowerment find full expression, which is a core tenet of sustainable tourism development (Olmedo et al., 2024). Indeed, the studies will confirm that where the members of the local community are active participants in planning and management in tourism, there is always a way in which long-term sustainability can be achieved since the community owns the resources that attract visitors and, therefore, will have a vested interest in preserving them (Utami et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Principles of sustainable tourism

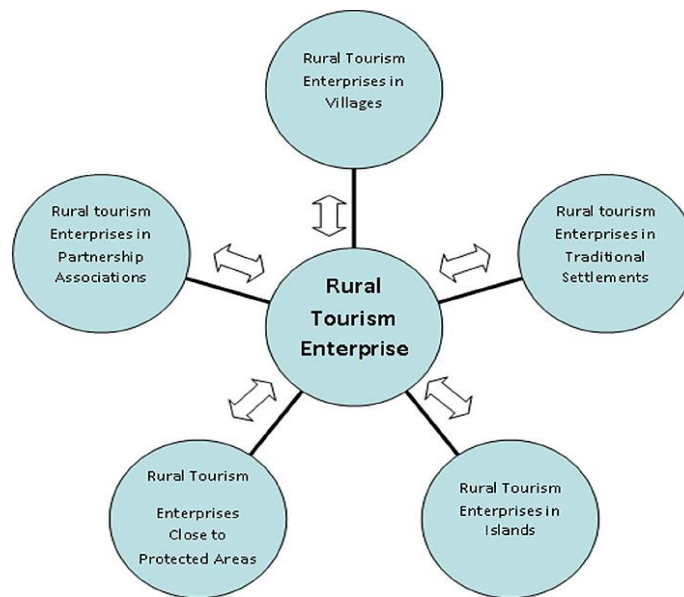


Source: Zamfir and Corbos (2015).

### 2.3. Challenges in tourism-based entrepreneurship for rural development

Tourism-based entrepreneurship may therefore have high potential, although in rural regions and especially in those that are disadvantaged, a host of obstacles will need to be overcome (Olmedo et al., 2024). That would include, for instance, an absence of access to financial resources due to the lack of collateral and credit history in general, or even preparing a proper financial plan that could justify the granting of finance (Aleffi et al., 2020). In addition, infrastructural inadequacies in these areas include poor access by roads, uncertain utilities, and abysmal or even non-existent digital infrastructure (Fotiadis et al., 2014). This may then discourage tourists from going to such areas and make operations by businesses a bit cumbersome. The administrative obstacles in accessing European Union (EU) funds for development were an obstacle

to rural tourism enterprises in Greece, and therefore, streamlining this funding process as one need it for local entrepreneurs effectively (Apostolopoulos et al., 2020). Other challenges include demographic and social structures typical of rural regions, such as aging of the population, outmigration of the younger population, and cultural conservatism, all elements that can play against entrepreneurial innovation and business expansion capabilities (Kubickova et al., 2017). This could further be exacerbated by the seasonal nature of tourism, entailing unstable incomes since rural tourism businesses may generate profits only during peak tourist seasons. Jamal and Dredge (2014) provide information that investigates the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the disadvantaged and minority populations. Moreover, it points out the necessity of community-based tourism approaches to ensure equal distribution of economic, social, and environmental benefits.

**Figure 2.** Rural tourism enterprises categorization

Source: Fotiadis et al. (2014).

## 2.4. Policy and support mechanisms for rural tourism entrepreneurship

Against this background of challenges, various policy interventions and support mechanisms have been put forward to facilitate tourism entrepreneurship in rural areas (Aquino et al., 2018). Additionally, public-private partnerships and community-based organizations can act as a solid backbone for supporting entrepreneurs in rural areas through the provision of training, networking, and mentorship (Kubickova et al., 2017). For example, researchers highlight customized support in conformity with local needs and capacities; they also claim that only these kinds of interventions may boast more efficient outcomes in terms of sustainable rural tourism development than those provided through the adoption of one-size-fits-all policies (Apostolopoulos et al., 2020). Other innovative models involve tourism routes that link several rural destinations into one with a themed itinerary. Furthermore, as stated by Briedenhann and Wickens (2004), the routes not only attract more tourists, but also allow the small businesses to cooperate for the reinforcement of economic impacts in an area.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper examines empirical studies and theoretical perspectives on how rural tourism initiatives by entrepreneurs can be supported or become a driver of sustainable development in the context of finding a balance among economic growth, environmental concern, and social equity. The clear research question is the role of entrepreneurship's economic adaptation to the international environment towards tourism and sustainable development of disadvantaged rural areas. The databases that are explored are databases from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and tourism statistics in general. By a comparative bibliographic review, this study collates theoretical insights and empirical

studies from diverse global contexts to undertake an integrated analysis of strategies, successes, and limitations of tourism-related entrepreneurship to pursue sustainable development goals at the rural level. Also, through this process, the findings show how entrepreneurship's economic adaptation can make a difference in disadvantaged rural areas and put forward recommendations for effective policy interventions that may contribute to the development of sustainable tourism, centered on and focused upon local communities.

## 3.1. Challenges in implementing entrepreneurship in rural tourism

Entrepreneurial activities in rural tourism hold great promises for economic and social rejuvenation, but on the other hand, their practical realization is facing grave problems. In general, less favored rural areas are deprived of infrastructure, financial resources, and institutional support that might favor entrepreneurial initiatives (Aleffi et al., 2020). This subsection discusses the factors hampering rural entrepreneurship, such as limits of access to capital, socio-demographic constraints, and environmental concerns. Understanding such challenges is fundamental for the formulation of policies and support mechanisms that would promote sustainable entrepreneurship in tourism in rural areas.

### 3.1.1. Financial and institutional barriers

Among the main challenges that rural tourism entrepreneurs must face in the context of current conditions, the limited access to financial resources stands out. Without reliable financing, rural entrepreneurs often cannot invest in the infrastructure, marketing, and operational improvements required to sustain a tourism business. Policies aiming at supporting rural entrepreneurship always need to indicate the development of support systems for intermediaries and specialized finance that address the peculiar economic facts of the rural areas (Dabson, 2001; Kubickova et al., 2017). Another

obstacle to rural tourism entrepreneurship is institutional barriers. For example, bureaucracy limits many people from entrepreneurship. Some of the bureaucratic obstacles include complicated procedures for getting permits and funding applications. In the EU, rural entrepreneurs often must overcome high barriers related to accessing funds that have been earmarked for regional development. Indeed, the bureaucratic nature of EU development programs, coupled with a lack of adequate support from local government institutions, has significantly limited the capacity of Greek rural tourism entrepreneurs to gain benefits from available funds. Streamlining the application process and increasing local government support would go a long way toward allowing rural entrepreneurs to take advantage of resources such as this (Apostolopoulos et al., 2020).

### *3.1.2. Infrastructure and accessibility challenges*

Poor road connectivity, unreliable utilities, and a lack of digital access impose infrastructural limitation challenges on the development of rural tourism. Most rural areas lack the transport infrastructure needed to make them easily accessible to and hence attractive for tourists. Tourism businesses might not be economic since most rural areas have a very poor state of roads and meager or no public transportation (Sharif & Lonik, 2014). Moreover, a lack of access to utilities such as water, electricity, and internet services can hinder rural entrepreneurship from meeting the basic expectations of tourists. This leads to poor levels of service quality and satisfaction among visitors (Lupi et al., 2017). The digital divide is particularly problematic in an era where online presence and digital marketing are of the essence regarding reaching tourists (Koyana & Mason, 2017). Many rural entrepreneurs face unstable access to the internet, among other general competencies in digital marketing that could affect their potential to communicate the values of their businesses.

### *3.1.3. Socio-demographic and cultural challenges*

Rural areas are often characterized by high rates of out-migration, especially by the young and better educated, in search of work opportunities in urban areas. This subsequently leads to a change in demographic processes in the countryside. An older population potentially reduces the pool of workers who are productive in entrepreneurial ventures or tourism services (Avolio et al., 2024). Also, the age structure of rural communities impacts their adaptability to the new economic model; the older population may be less open to innovation or the entrepreneurial risk-taking that is required for developing tourism businesses. This demographic imbalance represents a challenge to the structural sustainability of a lively entrepreneurial ecosystem within a rural community. Cultural conservatism can also act as an obstacle to the tourism entrepreneurship that exists in rural areas. Community resistance and/or cultural concerns that are apprehensive about dealing with people from other cultural backgrounds can reduce the potential supportive role of local entrepreneurs in those

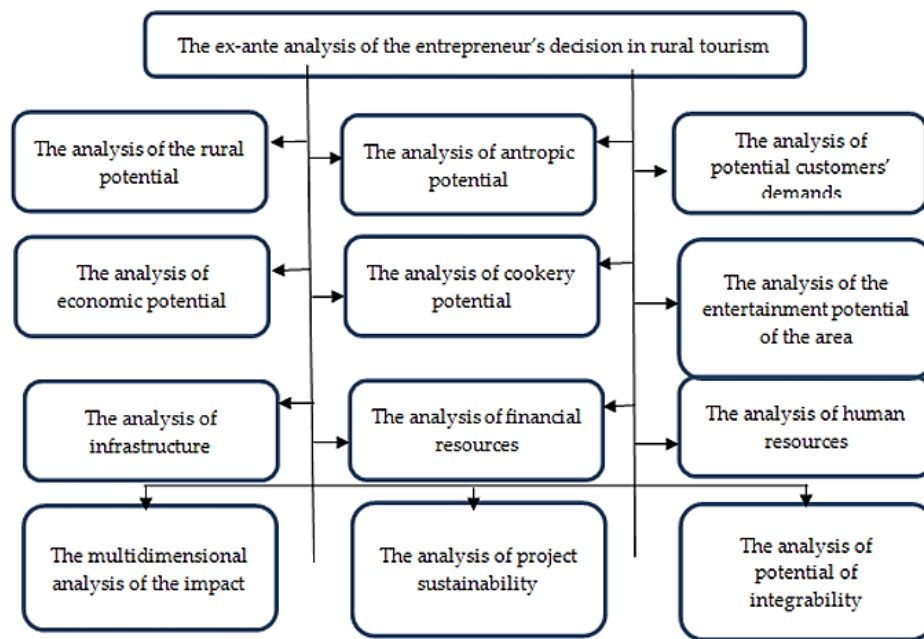
communities that are either unfamiliar or resistant to tourism as an economic strategy. Community awareness and developing local involvement are two of the most important strategies in ensuring that cultural barriers are overcome and the community buy-in for tourism initiatives occurs (Cooney & Licciardi, 2019).

### *3.1.4. Environmental and seasonal challenges*

Usual business operations are carried out in ecologically sensitive areas where the natural environment is one of the key elements that draw visitors to an area. In any case, balancing development in tourism with preservation of the environment has been a challenge. Tourism development can affect local ecosystems through habitat degradation, waste generation, and resource depletion, which may destroy, in fact, the very attractions that tourists are coming to see. Sharif and Lonik (2017) indicate that environmentally sustainable business models in rural tourism must engage in community environmental stewardship to be sustainable in the long term. Apart from this, rural tourism is also highly seasonal. Income and visitor numbers differ substantially throughout the year. Such a seasonal dependence might lead to unstable income among the entrepreneurs of rural tourism; hence, sustaining business through low-demand periods may become hard. In this way, seasonal tourism might induce further instability in the workforce, since employment opportunities may occur only during peak seasons. A reduction of seasonality may come through diversification of tourism products and development in rural tourism (Apostolopoulos et al., 2020).

### *3.1.5. Policy gaps and lack of tailored support*

Whereas there are numerous government programs and initiatives put in place to support entrepreneurship in rural areas, most have failed to offer the specific needs that tourism businesses require. Most policies are drawn with an urban or industrial sector in mind; thus, they apply ineffectively in supporting rural tourism entrepreneurs. For instance, funding programs might favor technology or manufacturing projects over tourism; hence, financial resources for projects related specifically to tourism become scarce. Nevertheless, Jamal and Dredge (2014) emphasize that policy frameworks are always flexible to satisfy the diverse sets of needs for rural tourism businesses, more so where these imply small-scale and community-based initiatives. Moreover, a lack of local support mechanisms such as business incubators, mentorship programs, and training workshops designed for tourism constrains rural entrepreneurs from acquiring proper skills and knowledge (Soare et al., 2017). Strengthening local support networks and framing policy frameworks that recognize the peculiar characteristics of rural tourism are important preconditions for sustainable development within these areas. In this process, public-private-community partnerships can be welcome steps in building supportive ecosystems for rural tourism entrepreneurs (Dabson, 2001; Sharif & Lonik, 2017).

**Figure 3.** Pattern of ex-ante analysis for the entrepreneur in rural tourism

Source: Soare et al. (2017).

### 3.2. Opportunities for entrepreneurship in rural tourism

Despite challenges, rural tourism entrepreneurship offers enormous opportunities in terms of economic growth, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. Often, rural areas are endowed with special natural and cultural resources which, thanks to entrepreneurial initiatives, may be given value as tourism assets. By capitalizing on trends like eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and community-based tourism, rural entrepreneurs could forge sustainable business models that appeal to travelers in search of authenticity and environmentally responsible experiences (AlAli et al., 2024). This subsection discusses the major opportunities in rural tourism entrepreneurship, focusing on sustainability and social engagement models in developing economic resilience.

#### 3.2.1. Eco-tourism and sustainable resource management

Eco-tourism is one of the fastest-growing opportunities in rural tourism, particularly among villages with rich natural landscapes and biodiversity. This is different from mass tourism; instead, it involves travel behavior that is sensitive to the environment and conserves it. The concept allows for small-scale tourism enterprises by rural entrepreneurs in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (Lourens, 2007). Various eco-tourism ventures that rural entrepreneurs can set up involve ecotourism lodges, nature tours, wildlife conservation programs, or organic farm visits. Some studies have also shown that ecotourism is one of the efficient ways for rural areas to balance economic growth with environmental preservation. This form of tourism allows guests to experience the value of the local ecosystems without necessarily exploiting them (Sharif & Lonik, 2017). Eco-tourism provides great avenues for residents to participate in the conservation process. This would include any

areas where wildlife or certain ecosystems are part of the attraction, wherein locals can conserve wildlife or such natural resources. This community-managed natural resource model would thus ensure the host community's assets are protected for future generations and generate income from tourism activities. According to researchers such as Jamal and Dredge (2014), the success of eco-tourism greatly depends on the presence of high levels of community involvement. Where present, successful development of ventures in eco-tourism can ensure longevity while concurrently providing economic benefits to the area (Jamal & Dredge, 2014).

#### 3.2.2. Cultural tourism and heritage preservation

Cultural tourism is a potent means of preserving and celebrating one's local traditions, arts, and history. This type of tourism can be put into practice by rural entrepreneurs as a way of attracting guests who want to take in the culture of the area, from its festivals and local handicrafts to its culinary traditions and historical sites. This kind of tourism nurtures not only direct income among local artisans and cultural practitioners but also community pride and identity. Rural entrepreneurs can develop an immersive experience into their heritage through initiatives such as craft markets, traditional cooking classes, and cultural performances (Sharif & Lonik, 2014). Tourism routes are another approach, with thematic focuses on aspects of culture that develop the impacts of cultural tourism to maximum effect. Such routes, such as those that combine points of interest like historical villages, artisan workshops, and food hot spots, provide tourists with a holistic cultural experience while ensuring a network of small operators across various communities' benefit. According to Briedenhann and Wickens (2004), tourism routes raise the attraction levels of rural destinations by advancing systematic, themed itineraries that encourage longer stays and higher spending per visitor.



### 3.2.3. Community-based tourism for economic and social empowerment

Community-based tourism refers to an all-inclusive tourism model that focuses on the ownership and participation of the community in tourism ventures. The model contrasts with the traditional models of tourism, where most of the profits are siphoned off to agents outside of the community. The concept ensures that economic benefits stay within the community. For such reasons, community-based tourism encourages the residents of the rural areas to participate in planning, management, and the operation of tourism to give them a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This kind of tourism, first and foremost, should contribute to economic self-sufficiency and resilience of rural territories through developing collective tourism entrepreneurship anchored in local traditions. It has been observed that community-based tourism works best in the most depressed rural areas where people have very limited economic options (Martini et al., 2020).

### 3.2.4. Social and female entrepreneurship in rural tourism

Social and female entrepreneurship have peculiar positions in rural tourism in prioritizing the social impacts with economic benefits. In this context, most social entrepreneurs often develop initiatives that try to respond to the various local challenges, such as poverty, education, and health issues, associated with combining such goals with tourism (Martini & Buffa, 2020). Social entrepreneurs, in the context of rural tourism, are described as “catalysts” because, aside from being drivers of economic activities, they have caused social cohesion and community participation (Mottiar et al., 2018). It is in this area of rural tourism that female entrepreneurship makes much more of a difference. Since women in rural areas have knowledge of culture, traditions, and hospitality where they come from, this knowledge can be used in the creation of authentic yet commercially viable tourism products. Examples of tourism entrepreneurship led by women show that many women-led businesses focus on the aspects of authenticity and community involvement that appeal to tourists in search of distinctive and socially responsible experiences (Marchesoni & de Ros, 2009).

### 3.2.5. Digital tourism and rural experience

This is now further driven by the emerging digital platforms, which enable rural entrepreneurs to reach out to a global audience and attract tourists interested in rural experiences. Digital tourism involves using online platforms for marketing rural destinations, creating virtual tours, and other forms of interaction that prime visitors before arrival. Through social media, travel websites, and booking platforms, rural entrepreneurs can now easily and inexpensively promote their services far and wide, in partial antidote to the stubborn disadvantages of limited physical accessibility (Ivona, 2021). What is more, countryside tourism can be marketed online through virtual tours of attractions, cookery classes, or other artisan-type classes. These experiences create an additional revenue stream whereby countryside entrepreneurs have access to more

income sources and can now access international markets. Digital tourism has also been found to increase the visibility of rural destinations, spark interest in younger and technology-enabled tourist markets, and allow rural tourism products to become better known (Cooney & Licciardi, 2019).

## 3.3. Case studies and best practices

Examining successful rural tourism initiatives provides insights into practical applications of sustainable entrepreneurship. These cases showcase varied strategies for rural tourism, from community-driven cultural experiences to pro-poor tourism models, illustrating how rural entrepreneurs leverage local resources for sustainable development.

### 3.3.1. Female entrepreneurship in Trentino, Italy: Cultural and experiential tourism

Among the different kinds of tourism ventures, women entrepreneurs have succeeded prominently in the development of local culture and heritage in Italy's Trentino region. The Trentino region, a mountainous area known for its artisan traditions, offers a variety of immersion cultural experiences that are operated and offered by women-owned small businesses. Most of these women-owned enterprises involve regional crafts, food traditions, and regional storytelling that deeply introduce the tourists to the history and life patterns of the region. Other entrepreneurs opened craft workshops to impart traditional skills in pottery, textile-making, and woodcraft to foreign visitors (Marchesoni & de Ros, 2009; Martini & Buffa, 2020).

### 3.3.2. Community-based tourism in Thailand: Social and economic empowerment

Community-based tourism has formed the backbone of rural development in Thailand, especially in the north, where the indigenous culture and natural landscapes are in high demand for international tourists. Villagers have developed models for community-based tourism that include tourist participation in rice farming, weaving, and traditional cooking. Often, homestays are offered by local families where members act as cultural ambassadors by sharing experiences and stories with guests (Chatkaewnapanon & Lee, 2022). The tourism industry in Thailand is a good example of how tourism can be used as an economic and social tool for empowering communities. Normally, communities are guided in setting up a community council, which oversees and manages tourism activities within the community, ensuring that practices are culturally and traditionally sensitive to the people while equally disseminating the benefits gained.

### 3.3.3. Agritourism in Tuscany, Italy: Supporting farmers and rural development

Agritourism in Tuscany is exemplary, combining agriculture and tourism in favor of the rural economy. Generally, Tuscany is renowned for its wine, olive oil, and organic produce from its famous farms and vineyards. The tourists visit to learn about rural Italian life in general. Agritourism can thus enable farmers to allow visitors to take farm

tours, and then participate in tastings and farm-to-table dining experiences. Some of them offer workshops regarding traditional farming techniques, cookery classes, and even accommodation, too, thereby creating a multi-elemental revenue stream (Lupi et al., 2017). Agritourism in Tuscany provides farmers with an opportunity to increase their income and, therefore, to continue farming. Most farms emphasize organic or biodynamic farming, attracting ecologically aware tourists and making Tuscany one of the leaders in sustainable agriculture.

### *3.3.4. Social entrepreneurship in rural Ireland: Leveraging tourism for community development*

Social entrepreneurs have played a significant role in the development of tourism projects in Ireland's rural areas, whereby they have focused on the needs within the community and derived economic benefits from them. A high value is placed on social or environmental impact in many such businesses, which reinvest profits into community-based projects like education programs, improved infrastructure, and environmental projects (Olmedo et al., 2024). The result has been that various Irish communities have been able to attract tourists interested in eco-tourism and cultural experiences, safe in the knowledge that revenues from tourists would remain within the local economy. In this way, social enterprises in Ireland have illustrated how tourism can be used to provide a wider social benefit for the well-being of the community and care for the environment (Mottiar et al., 2018; Olmedo et al., 2024).

### *3.3.5. Cultural route tourism in Spain: The Camino de Santiago pilgrimage*

The Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in Spain is a first-class example of cultural route tourism in which the financial effect has been nothing short of transformative for rural economies. Inns, restaurants, and artisan shops along the Camino have flourished as pilgrims and tourists require lodging, meals, and travel supplies. It has made the revival of several communities possible through job creation and attracting small businesses to prosper in rural areas (Gonzalez, 2018; Lois Gonzalez & Lopez, 2021). The success of the Camino de Santiago is attributed to several local and national interests. They also make provisions for different kinds of unique services related to guided history tours, special pilgrim services, and cultural events that can be linked with the history and spirituality along the Camino. This route of traditional culture not only helped in preserving the heritage and identity of northern Spain but also facilitated cross-cultural interactions and community growth.

### *3.3.6. Volunteer tourism in Nepal: Supporting community development projects*

Tourism through volunteering in Nepal has emerged as a significant mechanism for rural development, especially in the wake of the 2015 earthquake that ravaged most of these communities. Similarly, rural areas of Nepal have opened their doors to international volunteers who help bring about long-term development projects such as constructing

schools, health facilities, and providing agricultural training programs. This often takes the form of volunteers being placed in homestays with locals; direct economic benefits to families hosting them allow both tourists and residents to engage in rich cultural exchange (Wearing et al., 2020). Apart from reconstruction works, tourism volunteer activities have targeted skill building in farm resource management methods to give a fillip to productivity and improve food security. Tourism in Nepal epitomizes a way for tourism to support basic community needs and attain an understanding in solidarity across borders (Avolio et al., 2024).

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Recommendations for policy and practice**

Rural tourism entrepreneurship usually goes well when supported by good policies, involvement of the community, and sustainability. Throughout the paper, while outlining challenges and opportunities arising from the policies at the local and national levels, this subsection offers recommendations that were brought up in order to improve rural tourism as an effective tool for sustainable development in less-favored rural areas.

#### *4.1.1. Strengthening access to funding and financial support*

One of the big problems encountered by tourism entrepreneurs in rural areas is their relatively small financial capacity to invest. Due to this, it is expected by the government to attempt the establishment of funding schemes that would serve the particular needs of rural tourism ventures through low-interest loans, grants, and subsidies, especially for small rural businesses, which would allow these ventures to invest in infrastructures and services (Dias et al., 2021). It is also important to conduct financial literacy training for the rural entrepreneurs to enable them to manage the available funds for wider access to financial services. Public-private partnerships can also play a critical role in sourcing funds to finance rural tourism. Partnerships between governments, local banks, and private investors may establish micro-financing programs targeting rural entrepreneurs who cannot access traditional financing.

#### *4.1.2. Simplifying bureaucratic processes and streamlining access to resources*

This factor, in most instances, occurs when bureaucratic hurdles impede the ability of rural entrepreneurs to access government support and funding. Policy makers should try to reduce the bureaucratic procedures associated with the application process. In this way, it will be very easy for rural businesses to meet some of the requirements. Simplifying documentation, enabling online applications, and having support centers available with well-trained personnel locally is one sure way of having entrepreneurs access resources more easily (Dias et al., 2021). One-stop resource centers can also be established at a local level, with services ranging from funding opportunities to business registration to tourism-specific regulatory counsel. Such centers may stand between the rural entrepreneur and other



governmental resources, freeing up burdens from business owners while providing access to support (Ivona, 2021).

#### *4.1.3. Supporting sustainable business practices and environmental stewardship*

Eco-tourism and agritourism are only two such models of sustainable tourism that rely explicitly on environmentally sensitive practices to protect the very resources attracting visitors. Policymakers at all levels should encourage sustainability by offering incentives to businesses for implementing eco-friendly operations that include renewable energy, waste reduction, and water conservation in the form of tax breaks or grants. Education also plays a paramount role in fostering sustainability. Local governments can provide workshops in environmental stewardship, concentrating efforts on sustainable farming, waste management, and energy-efficient practices. Raising awareness among rural entrepreneurs and residents regarding the importance of sustainability can facilitate community-led conservation initiatives that contribute not only to environmental health but also to tourism appeal (Koyana & Mason, 2017).

#### *4.1.4. Expanding digital infrastructure and marketing support*

Limited digital access adversely affects rural tourism because tourism marketing cannot become as effective as it may be, and access to online resources becomes limited. Investment in high-speed internet and telecommunications infrastructure connectivity is so crucial for rural tourism development (Utami et al., 2023). That means that rural connectivity should be given priority in the government's digital development plans, as digital access would enable rural entrepreneurs to link with more people and serve online marketing platforms more effectively. Besides building the digital infrastructure, governments and tourism boards can help rural entrepreneurs by training them in the ways of digital marketing (Sharif & Lonik, 2014). Workshops on social media, website development, and e-commerce strategies will help entrepreneurs develop such a set of skills needed to promote their products and services online (Efthimiou, 2024).

#### *4.1.5. Facilitating partnerships between public, private, and community stakeholders*

In this respect, the much-needed supportive environment for rural tourism entrepreneurship is indeed provided by the collaboration between public institutions, private businesses, and community organizations. Government agencies may facilitate this collaboration through forums and networking events matching rural entrepreneurs with potential investors, mentors, and business partners (Soare et al., 2017). The needs can be met at the same time, like funding, mentorship, and cultural and environmental responsibility of the tourism venture, through public-private-community partnerships. In this case, such partnerships align the objectives of the different stakeholders in creating a multidimensional support structure that enhances the sustainability and resilience of rural tourism businesses (Mottiar et al., 2018).

#### *4.1.6. Developing educational programs for skill building and tourism management*

Among the rural entrepreneurs in tourism, the skill factor remains particularly important in terms of training and education. Collaboration between local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is needed in conducting regular workshops on hospitality management, customer service, sustainable tourism, and how to operate a business. Targeted programs that meet the peculiar challenges of rural tourism, for instance, management of seasonal businesses and cultural sensitivity, can equip these entrepreneurs with reality in the tourism sector (Manescu et al., 2024; Efthimiou, 2024). Programs should also be targeted at underrepresented groups, including women and the youth, who have other barriers to becoming entrepreneurs. Mentorship programs that would match rural entrepreneurs with experienced professionals in the tourism sector would further facilitate the process of skill development and encourage a culture of sharing expertise within the rural community.

### **4.2. Future directions and research opportunities**

As rural tourism entrepreneurship continuously develops, there are many gaps that exist and offer important avenues for further research and innovation. These solutions to the gaps would have the potential to support sustainable tourism ventures and allow rural entrepreneurs to be able to respond positively to changing economic, social, and environmental conditions. This subsection discusses some possible future directions for enhancing rural tourism in terms of sustainable development, funding innovation, cultural impact, and digital transformation.

#### *4.2.1. Advancing sustainable tourism practices*

Sustainability is key to the longer-term prospects of tourism in rural areas, but there is a need for more sophisticated models that balance economic growth against environmental and social care. Further research may focus on new eco-tourism models that minimize resource use using low-impact accommodation, integration of renewable energy, and reduction of waste. Agritourism and community-based eco-tourism models illustrate unique opportunities for the pursuit of sustainability. Research might be focused on the environmental and economic benefits of agroecological farming practices and biodiversity conservation in systems rich in natural resources. The study of local adaptations from such models may also provide insight for communities around the world in their struggle to balance tourism with environmental preservation (Ivona, 2021).

#### *4.2.2. Exploring innovative funding mechanisms for rural tourism*

One of the major constraints facing entrepreneurs in rural tourism continues to be limited access to traditional sources of finance. In this regard, studies on alternative mechanisms for financing, including crowdfunding, social impact investment, and community-based financing, may emphasize a series of new ways by which businesses in rural areas might acquire the capital they need (Briedenhann &

Wickens, 2004). For example, crowdfunding as a source of finance for micro-level tourism initiatives has been growing in popularity, whereby direct funds can be raised from visitors and well-wishers for any community. Another promising avenue is impact investment, with emphasis on creating social and environmental benefits alongside financial returns (Lourens, 2007). This inquiry into the way investors impact value and finance rural tourism ventures will help establish the criteria that make tourism projects more attractive to socially conscious investors.

#### *4.2.3. Assessing the cultural and social impact of rural tourism*

With the growth and development of rural tourism, understanding the long-term effects of tourism on the social and cultural elements of such a community has become very important. Further studies are required on how tourism influences the communal ways of life, cultural expression, and identity at a local level (Aquino et al., 2018). It becomes imperative that strategies for mitigating cultural commodification be explored, especially in regions where cultural heritage forms a key tourism asset. An investigation could be conducted to ascertain the best practices that strike a balance between authenticity and commercialization, ensuring that tourism strengthens rather than weakens cultural values. Emphasizing such cultural dimensions in future research will contribute to the development of tourism models that preserve respect and are empowering to the local cultures (Olmedo et al., 2024).

#### *4.2.4. Enhancing digital transformation in rural tourism*

Digital transformation is changing the way in which rural tourism is being marketed and managed, and how rural tourism is consumed. Unfortunately, most rural areas are highly inadequate in basic infrastructure and digital literacy to better exploit these developments. Future research could focus on topics such as the role of technology in expanding the reach of rural tourism, how virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can be used to enhance visitor experiences, and how they can provide new revenue streams through virtual tourism (Efthimiou, 2024). Digital marketing strategies that could help identify and appeal to rural tourism from a social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and online platform perspective may be useful and pragmatic for entrepreneurs in appealing to a wider audience globally (Hoarau, 2022; Efthimiou, 2024). The impact of digital accessibility by means of the internet and mobile connectivity has brought on rural tourism success may assist in steering infrastructure investments accordingly. The digital skills training programs, which are particularly designed for rural entrepreneurs, can narrow the gap in the digital divide to better equip the locals with the ability to reach out to and communicate with tourists (Utami et al., 2023).

#### *4.2.5. Fostering resilience in rural tourism enterprises*

Economic instability in rural tourism businesses can often be related to factors of seasonality, environmental change, and market fluctuations.

Resilience strategies for rural entrepreneurs may be developed through support for the length and robustness of their businesses after opening. Further research could investigate adaptive business models, including income diversification from tourism in combination with agriculture or crafts, that provide a diversified economic base of the enterprise (Kubickova et al., 2017). Building resiliency into the framework of rural tourism enables the community to establish a solid economic base upon which stability and growth can be supported (Manescu et al., 2024).

#### *4.2.6. Integrating health and wellness tourism in rural settings*

With the current trends in health and wellness tourism, for example, rural areas are well placed to offer retreats, spa resorts, and holistic health programs based on nature. Further research could focus on the development of models of wellness tourism by rural communities that use natural landscapes for the restoration of mental and physical well-being. Other studies may investigate how wellness tourism contributes to the improvement of the rural economy, particularly for those regions that have an abundance of natural resources to supply activities related to hiking, meditation, and eco-therapy (Hoarau, 2022). Further research into health outcomes for visitors and locals alike might also delineate the contribution of rural wellness tourism to overall community health.

#### *4.2.7. Examining policy innovations for rural tourism development*

In other words, good policies help provide an enabling environment that can turn an abstract idea of rural tourism into a concrete reality. The future study can investigate a host of new policy regimes that encourage strategic partnerships that build up sustainable tourism practices along with better rural entrepreneurship (Manescu et al., 2024). Experiments like offering tax incentives for nature-friendly tourism projects or zoning reforms to accommodate agritourism can be studied for effective approaches in other regions (Hoarau, 2022). Further research into cross-border tourism policies could also yield lessons on how regional cooperation can enhance rural tourism initiatives.

#### *4.2.8. Encouraging cross-sector collaboration and innovation*

Cross-sectoral collaborations, like those among agriculture, technology, and tourism, potentially provide new opportunities for rural development. Further research might investigate how firms in the tourism sector of rural areas are forging alliances with other sectors to diversify or add value to their offerings, such as agricultural products featured in the tourism product, or the use of technology to deliver added-value services to tourists. Innovation hubs/coworking spaces in rural areas may offer insights into the collaborative environment as a creativity enabler, thus fostering small businesses in the development of new tourism products (Utami et al., 2023). This might also be further explored through examining types of partnerships among local governments, private investors, and NGOs that could have implications for

the research on models of sustainable development, a model that would meet economic, environmental, and social goals interdependently.

### **4.3. Impact assessment and success metrics in rural tourism entrepreneurship**

In essence, the success of rural tourism initiatives should be gauged multi-dimensionally, including economic, social, and cultural impacts aside from the environmental impact. It is only through setting indicators to measure benefits and areas of improvement in rural tourism that rural tourism can be said to be effective and sustainable. This subsection sets a platform on which to discuss key success metrics or methods of impact assessment; such a framework informs analysis of the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of rural tourism entrepreneurship.

#### *4.3.1. Economic impact: Job creation, income generation, and economic diversification*

Among the primary objectives of rural tourism are regional economic development, job creation, increased earnings, and economic diversification. Employment measures in tourism-related sectors such as accommodation, retailing, and crafts indicate the consequences for rural employment situations. Indicators in the number of tourism jobs created, the share of residents in jobs related to tourism, and the seasonality of jobs are key measures of the economic effect of tourism (Efthimiou, 2024). Another important indicator of this is the income level generated at the local level, for which tourism can be a secure revenue source for rural communities. Indicators such as the average per capita income, increase in household income, and spending by the local community on products and services show how much tourism has developed the local economy (Utami et al., 2023).

#### *4.3.2. Social and cultural impact: Social cohesion, community engagement, and cultural preservation*

Social and cultural impacts are key indicators of the sustainability and acceptance of tourism in host communities. Social cohesion, represented by community satisfaction with tourism, engagement in tourism activities, and shared ownership of tourism activities, indicates the impacts of tourism on the social fabric of communities (Aquino et al., 2018). Community attitudes, as derived from surveys of residents, comments by residents, and levels of community participation in tourism planning, provide qualitative measures of social cohesion and the level of support for tourism activity at the local level (Mottiar et al., 2018). Other relevant measures would pertain to cultural preservation, particularly in areas where heritage and tradition are central to the tourist experience.

#### *4.3.3. Environmental sustainability: Resource conservation, biodiversity protection, and environmental footprint*

It is generally observed that environmental sustainability is a core concern of rural tourism, whose key attractions are often natural landscapes and ecosystems. These would include resource

conservation efforts, biodiversity protection, and environmental footprints that involve tourism impacts in a broader sense (Anzules-Falcones et al., 2024). For instance, the dynamics related to water and energy use around businesses, waste management practices, and what percentage of material sourcing is done locally in operations are indicative of sustainability practices undertaken by rural entrepreneurs.

#### *4.3.4. Visitor satisfaction and experience quality*

Visitor satisfaction and quality of experience are two very important measures, indicating above all how well tourism services function and whether visitors will return. It is the direct result of feedback from the tourists themselves, obtained by survey research, online review analysis, and social media monitoring that assesses the quality of the services delivered by businesses in rural areas. Indicators such as the overall satisfaction rate, net promoter score (NPS), and percentage of repeat visitors provide insight into visitor perceptions and the attractiveness of rural destinations. Experience quality also encompasses aspects such as authenticity and uniqueness since these features make rural tourism distinct from more traditional forms of tourism (Khan et al., 2012). Feedback regarding the authenticity of cultural experiences, interaction with the host community, and quality of stay and services offered helps rural entrepreneurs to hone their products. High visitor satisfaction rates not only help word-of-mouth marketing but strengthen businesses of tourism in the long run because a more satisfied tourist is very willing to return and recommend others to the destination (Sharif & Lonik, 2017).

#### *4.3.5. Long-term economic and social resilience*

Besides, sustainable tourism development should be resilient in the face of economic downturn, environmental change, and market fluctuation. Indicators for long-term resilience could also include the level of financial stability of rural tourism businesses to remain in operation during low or difficult economic seasons (Mottiar et al., 2018). This can be done by monitoring diversification of income sources, the level of emergency funds that may be accessible, and the capacity for financial recovery. The community's ability to adapt to the changes induced by tourism, whether in traditional lifestyles or a new job structure, is an essential measure in the context of social resilience. Community satisfaction with peak tourist seasons, ability to adapt to regulatory changes, and the ability to deal with global tourism trends such as eco-tourism or health and wellness tourism form part of the resilience assessments (Olmedo et al., 2024). Long-term success in rural tourism often depends on the extent to which host communities and local businesses can adapt to change while retaining core values of their cultures and natural environments (Cooney & Licciardi, 2019).

#### *4.3.6. Developing comprehensive impact assessment frameworks*

To fully capture the measurement of such indicators, comprehensive impact assessment frameworks for rural communities and policymakers

need to be developed in consideration of specific tourism models. This can be done by combining some quantitative metrics such as economic indicators or environmental data with qualitative feedback from the community members and tourists. These will, therefore, provide a holistic approach to analyzing the impacts of tourism, combining data analysis with insights from the community on how to make necessary adjustments for sustainable growth (Hoarau, 2022; Mosiuk et al., 2023). Impact assessment frameworks should be periodically reviewed and adapted, considering feedback from local stakeholders, such as engaged entrepreneurs, residents, and government bodies. Transparency in impact assessment reporting is another aspect that anchors accountability within the process of keeping rural tourism activities in step with community values and sustainability objectives. This collaborative tourism success monitoring approach can engender a culture of continuous improvement and shared responsibility, strengthening the foundation of rural tourism entrepreneurship (Mosiuk et al., 2023; AlAli et al., 2024).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism entrepreneurship is a tectonic pathway toward sustainable development within economically disadvantaged rural areas because it links economic, social, and environmental goals together. For the rural community, pressing challenges such as economic decline, migration of residents, and loss of cultural identity provide ample arguments for adopting tourism entrepreneurship as an economic diversifier, which can protect the typology of local heritage and natural landscapes (Manescu et al., 2024). These assets, from natural beauty to cultural heritage and farm-based resources, can be harnessed by focused entrepreneurship in pursuit of niche tourism experiences that attract international visitors and contribute to local incomes in a sustainable manner. In this regard, supportive policies and easy access to resources are paramount. Financial incentives, streamlined regulatory frameworks, and investments in infrastructure enable rural entrepreneurs to create and expand tourism enterprises for the benefit of rural economies and residents.

This provides a unique opportunity for governments, NGOs, and private investors to come together in the creation of conditions that would avail rural tourism with an enabling environment to thrive. Indeed, support mechanisms duly tailored to the peculiar needs of rural tourism include access to low-interest loans, grants towards sustainable practices, and capacity-building programs for local communities (Mosiuk et al., 2023). These sorts of stakeholder interventions help overcome some of the barriers facing rural entrepreneurs in the process of providing tourism services. Sustainability is one of the core pillars on which successful rural tourism rests. These models of eco-tourism, community-based tourism, and agritourism all provide a balance between economic development and ecological stewardship. In so doing, the rural entrepreneurs not only answer the demand for modern, environmentally conscious travelers but also protect the resources that make rural destinations attractive in the first place (AlAli et al., 2024). For instance, with the focus on resource conservation, protection of biodiversity, and

reduction of waste, rural tourism businesses contribute to the environment so that their operations remain viable and useful for future generations. But the social and cultural dimensions of rural tourism also have huge potential. As rural tourism expands, it increases social cohesion, secures community pride, and arouses the preservation of local culture. By embracing members from the community in both the planning and operation of tourism activities, rural tourism builds up a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Such a collaborative attitude is essential in the perpetuation of tourism initiatives representative of community values and cultural authenticity (Ivona, 2021). Much promise lies ahead for the role of technology and innovative funding within rural tourism. The potential of digital platforms, from social media to virtual tourism experiences, is very significant for expanding the visibility of rural tourism products, and it allows rural entrepreneurs to access much wider markets.

Certainly, further research and investment in digital infrastructure, e-marketing, and training in digital literacy would be needed to really allow rural enterprises to exploit their potential in terms of visibility and attractiveness. This could also be complemented with alternative funding mechanisms, such as crowdfunding, impact investing, and cooperative models, to make the necessary resources available that would enable rural entrepreneurs to maintain and grow their businesses. Further, as rural tourism evolves, it is impact assessment frameworks and measures of success that will continue to guide such growth. In turn, economic resilience, community engagement, cultural preservation, and environmental health will all be well-monitored indicators driving the right decisions in a manner that keeps tourism development in tune with sustainable development goals. Such assessments will let the rural communities continuously refine their tourism strategies, keeping growth balanced, inclusive, and benefiting all stakeholders concerned (Martini et al., 2020). It is, therefore, in a privileged position to contribute to the solution of some critical current socioeconomic and environmental challenges that disadvantaged rural areas are facing. In this light, rural tourism fosters resilience in the support of traditions developed locally, with sustainable practices that help enhance the local livelihood and strengthen the attachment of a community to its place and heritage. The road to sustainable rural tourism will demand constant collaboration by entrepreneurs, policymakers, and the community, sharing a commitment to the conservation of the character and integrity of rural destinations. As more rural communities adopt tourism as a workable development strategy, so too do they have the potential to create enduring legacies that support not only their immediate needs but those of future generations. Also, farmers will be converted to the tourism industry, and the rural tourism will have an evicting effect on activities and the workforce in all. The research has some limitations: the entrepreneurship as a driver of rural development, the challenges in tourism-based entrepreneurship for rural development, and the future tourism's resilience. This detailed conclusion ties together the themes discussed in the article, reflecting on the lessons learned from the role and the opportunities of entrepreneurship's economic adaptation and looking forward to

the strategic actions needed for the tourism sector's sustainable and resilient future and development in rural areas. It calls for a unified approach to navigating the new landscape, emphasizing sustainability, collaboration, and innovation as key drivers of future success. Searching and documenting the situation after the reshaping of tourism industry trends, combined with the effects of the newly shaped factors on the tourism environment, could be an incentive for future research. Finally, future research should focus on

the comparative recording and presentation of the resilience of the tourism sector and the whole economic development and adaptation for the rural areas through the transformation of the tourism industry. to various shocks, as well as the changes in tourists' choices brought about by the new forms of tourism that have resulted from the digital transformation of the tourism industry, and as well as which of the resilience and adaptation factors of the branch have stood out according to the tourists' choices.

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