

Session G3

The Development of Ecotourism in Rural Kazakhstan: A Stakeholder Analysis - Aizhan Tleuberdinova, Stephen Pratt, Xeniya Kulik, Veronika Kulik and Dinara Salauatova

This study examines the economic landscape of rural Kazakhstan, where 41% of the population resides but contributes a mere 2.8% to the GDP. Faced with limited infrastructure and substantial regional disparities, the imperative for alternative economic avenues is evident. This paper posits ecotourism as a potential catalyst for sustainable prosperity in rural areas, capitalizing on its environmental, recreational, and socio-cultural attributes. International evidence underscores the positive impact of ecotourism on local communities, manifesting in job creation, elevated living standards, income growth, and support for small businesses. Emphasized in various studies as a key strategy for balanced regional development, ecotourism offers a reliable path for economic diversification, rural economy transformation, and the preservation of culture and the environment.

The successful development of ecotourism hinges on active local community involvement, particularly in fostering entrepreneurship. Kazakhstan faces a challenge with its small and medium-sized businesses contributing only about 30% to the GDP, a notable contrast with developed nations where this figure ranges from 50% to 60%. Furthermore, the unfamiliarity of Kazakh entrepreneurs, especially those in rural areas, with tourism necessitates an investigation into villagers' perceptions and readiness for new projects in the tourism industry.

This study narrows its focus to ecological tourism in rural areas of Kazakhstan, delving into the fundamental economic and social relations that underpin rural and ecological tourism development. The primary goal is to provide theoretical justification and practical recommendations for establishing organizational, economic, and institutional conditions conducive to ecological tourism in rural Kazakhstan. The survey results of rural residents' entrepreneurial intentions offer valuable insights for the State, regional authorities, and business community, guiding the formulation of programs that stimulate entrepreneurial activity in rural areas. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on sustainable rural development and provides a foundation for informed policymaking in the context of ecotourism in Kazakhstan.

Promoting or Inhibiting? Implementation of Agritourism Policy and Well-Being of Rural Residents - Tingting Huo, Anyu Liu, Jinhai Zhang, Mingzhi Luo and Chengyu Xiong

Happiness is one of the eternal pursuits of humanity. However, from the perspective of the “happiness paradox”, economic growth has been found to not necessarily improve individuals’ well-being. Among all economic sectors, tourism is recognized as a happiness industry and is dedicated to enhancing the sense of well-being enjoyed by both tourists and residents in rural destinations. The initiation of a tourism program in a community tends to dramatically change the livelihood of the residents in economic, environmental, cultural and social aspects. Meanwhile, existing studies have also indicated that the “happiness paradox” exists in the tourism industry. Since residents are crucial stakeholders in rural communities and their well-being is closely related to their support for tourism development, it’s of great necessity to explore whether rural tourism policy promotes residents’ well-being and the possible influencing mechanisms. Whereas, such questions remain unanswered in the literature. Using survey data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) between 2010 and 2018, this study aims to employ the difference-in-differences (DID) method to empirically examine the overall impact of the policy of leisure agriculture and rural tourism launched in 2011 on rural residents’ well-being. This study provides effective guidance for evaluating the micro-effects of rural tourism policies and improving residents’ well-being and further supporting tourism.

The Impact of Entrepreneurs' Learning Ability on SMEs Recovery from The Pandemic—A Longitudinal Study of B&Bs In Zhangjiajie, China - Kexin Guo, Anyu Liu, Shanshan Lin, Weizheng Zhang and Yoo Ri Kim

As the recovery of the global tourism market, destinations and the industry are embracing the back of visitors across the world. The tourism industry is dominant by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs are key contributors to employment and innovation, and their resurgence is essential for fostering economic stability, job creation, and overall business resilience in the post-pandemic landscape. In the Endogenous Growth Theory and New Growth Theory, human capital and knowledge are key determinants of economic growth in a representative economy, respectively. Nonetheless either of them is determined by entrepreneurs, particularly the entrepreneurs' learning ability.

Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate the influence of entrepreneurs' learning ability on the recovery of SEMs' performance and its transition mechanism, taking B&B in Zhangjiajie, China as a showcase. A two-waves longitudinal on-site survey was conducted. The first wave was collected in June – August 2020 which is during the pandemic whereas the second was in November 2023 post the pandemic. The systematic sampling was used to select B&Bs on the registration list from the local B&B industry association and 210 observations were successfully collected. Unfortunately, only 104 were collected in the second wave with the rest exited the B&B sector, resulting in a survival rate of 49.5%.

The Two-waves latent change score model (2W-LCSM) will be used to disclose the longitudinal change of B&B's performance and the dynamic relationship between the performance and the learning ability of entrepreneurs, mediated by the risk management competence. Financial capital, social capital, entrepreneurship orientation, B&B features and demographics and entrepreneurs will be controlled.

This study makes the first attempt to disclose entrepreneurs' learning ability on SMEs' recovery in the tourism literature, generating new knowledge to the entrepreneurship literature and evidencing the micro foundation of the Endogenous Growth Theory and New Growth Theory in tourism economics. The findings could also generate useful implications to support the sustained recovery of the B&B sector.