



EXperiential TOurism for sustainable Rural development

WP2: Success stories and needs mapping for VET renewal in rural tourism

A2.1: EU collection of success stories and analysis of national trends



Analysis of the current national status of rural tourism and related VET offers

Individual Interviews National Report - Infodef

INTERVIEWS INFORMATION

Please add the main information about the interviews.

COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Spain

CITY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Valladolid

NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS: 20

DATES OF THE INTERVIEWS: from April 2024 until June 2024

VENUES OF THE INTERVIEWS: mainly by telephone and online.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (per interview):1

TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDERS:

INTERVIEWS DESCRIPTION

Please provide a detailed description of the interviews.

- **Number of interview implementers and description of their background:**

Three interviewers, all experts in research, development and implementation of European projects.

- **Number and description of the participants' background:**

In the questionnaires 20 subjects with the most diverse profiles have participated, on the one hand the entrepreneurs in different types of rural tourism and on the other hand the workers in different rural tourism enterprises with profiles such as chambermaids, oenologists, receptionists, etc.

- **Duration of the interviews:** 30 minutes

- **Main structure and agenda of the interviews:**

1. *Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs:*

Introduction:

- *Brief explanation of the EXTOR project, its goals, and its co-financing by the European Union.*
- *Mention of GDPR compliance and data privacy assurances.*

- *Request for consent from participants.*

Demographic information:

- *Questions about the start date of the tourism business.*
- *Size of the company (Micro, Small, Medium, Large).*
- *Sector of the company (e.g., sustainable tourism, experiential tourism, ecotourism).*

Business characteristics:

- *Type of business (e.g., accommodation, spa, farm, winery, shop, arts and crafts).*
- *Sources of financing used to start the business (EU funding, national funding, bank loan, personal investment).*

Challenges and opportunities:

- *Awareness of European or national funding opportunities.*
- *Challenges faced since starting the business (financial difficulties, lack of skills/education, low demand, lack of local participation).*
- *Sustainability practices and how sustainability is ensured.*

Training and development:

- *Participation in professional education and training programs related to rural tourism.*
- *Topics/areas where further training would be beneficial (e.g., experiential tourism, sustainable tourism, digital marketing, EU funding rules).*

Sectoral gaps and recommendations:

- *Gaps in the rural tourism sector in their country (e.g., lack of infrastructure, basic services, education/training programs, financial support, promotion).*
- *Recommendations for improving the rural tourism sector.*
- *Other types of support desired as a rural tourism entrepreneur.*

2. Rural Tourism Professionals:

Introduction:

- *Brief explanation of the EXTOR project, its goals, and its co-financing by the European Union.*
- *Mention of GDPR compliance and data privacy assurances.*
- *Request for consent from participants.*

Professional background:

- *Questions about the sector in which they work (e.g., sustainable tourism, experiential tourism, ecotourism, agrotourism).*
- *Specific type of enterprise they work in (e.g., accommodation, spa, farm, winery, shop, arts and crafts).*

Job details:

- *Profession (e.g., receptionist, guide, educator).*
- *Duration of working in the tourism rural sector.*

Challenges and issues:

- *Challenges faced in their professional role (e.g., lack of sufficient education/training, support for digital transition, infrastructure issues, basic services deficiencies).*
- *Specific examples or descriptions of the issues they face.*

Training and professional development:

- *Participation in any professional education and training programs related to rural tourism.*
- *Indication of which programs or types of training were attended.*
- *Areas where they believe further training would be beneficial (e.g., experiential tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism practices, digital marketing).*

Sectoral gaps and improvements:

- *Perceived gaps in the rural tourism sector in their country (e.g., lack of infrastructure, education/training programs, financial support, digital and ecological transition support).*
- *Recommendations for improving the rural tourism sector.*
- *Additional types of support they would like to receive as professionals in the sector.*

- **Description of any group and/or interactive activities:**

The interviews have been conducted individually so there are no collaborative activities.

- **Level of engagement of the participants:**

The professionals working in rural tourism, including guides, educators, and hospitality staff, also demonstrated significant engagement. They were open about the challenges they encounter in their roles, such as the need for better infrastructure, support for digital transitions, and access to continuous professional development. Their feedback was detailed, reflecting a strong desire to see improvements in their work environment and the overall sector.

Professionals showed a keen interest in further training, particularly in new tourism trends and digital skills. Their responses indicated a willingness to adapt and grow, aligning with the project's objective to

enhance the competencies of rural tourism stakeholders. The professionals' engagement was not only in sharing their current experiences but also in suggesting practical solutions and improvements, showcasing their commitment to the project's goals.

- **Any challenges faced during the interviews:**

Participant availability: Coordinating with busy entrepreneurs and professionals who have demanding schedules might have been challenging. Ensuring that they could dedicate time to complete the survey without disrupting their daily operations could have required careful planning.

Understanding and interpreting questions: Participants may have faced difficulties in understanding certain questions, especially those related to technical aspects such as funding rules and sustainability practices. This could have led to incomplete or inaccurate responses.

Technical issues: Given that the surveys were conducted online, there could have been technical issues such as internet connectivity problems or difficulties accessing the survey platform. These issues might have hindered some participants from completing the survey smoothly.

Data privacy concerns: Some participants might have been hesitant to share detailed information about their businesses or professional experiences due to concerns about data privacy and confidentiality. Despite assurances of GDPR compliance, building trust with participants to ensure candid responses could have been a challenge.

Language barriers: The surveys were conducted across multiple countries with different primary languages. Although the surveys were likely translated, nuances in language and cultural differences could have affected how participants understood and responded to the questions.

Survey length and complexity: The comprehensiveness of the survey, while necessary for gathering detailed insights, might have been overwhelming for some participants although the majority considered it well designed and not too extensive.

- **Main conclusions of the interviews:**

Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs

Challenges in accessing funding: Many rural tourism entrepreneurs face significant hurdles in securing funding for their projects. While some have successfully obtained EU or national funding, others rely heavily on personal investments or bank loans. The complexity and competitiveness of grant applications pose a barrier for many.

Importance of sustainable practices: A majority of entrepreneurs emphasize the importance of incorporating sustainable practices into their operations. These practices not only align with environmental goals but also attract a growing segment of eco-conscious tourists.

Need for professional development: Entrepreneurs expressed a strong need for ongoing professional development. Many have participated in training programs related to digital marketing, business management, and sustainable tourism. However, there is a demand for more accessible and specialized training that addresses the unique challenges of rural tourism.

Community engagement and support: Successful rural tourism businesses often rely on strong community support and engagement. Entrepreneurs report that collaboration with local communities enhances the authenticity of the tourist experience and contributes to the preservation of local culture and traditions. Community involvement is also crucial for the development of complementary services and products.

Digital transformation: The shift towards digitalization is seen as both an opportunity and a challenge. Entrepreneurs recognize the potential of digital tools to enhance marketing efforts, streamline operations, and improve customer engagement. Nonetheless, the lack of digital skills and resources remains a significant obstacle for many, highlighting the need for targeted digital training programs.

Impact of regulatory environment: The regulatory environment can be a double-edged sword. While regulations ensure quality and sustainability standards, they can also be cumbersome and restrictive. Entrepreneurs call for more supportive policies that facilitate business operations while maintaining high standards of environmental and social responsibility.

Market dynamics and trends: Entrepreneurs have observed a shift in market dynamics, with a growing interest in experiential and sustainable tourism. Travellers are increasingly seeking authentic experiences that connect them with nature and local culture. This trend presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring businesses to continuously innovate and adapt to meet changing consumer preferences.

Infrastructure and accessibility: Infrastructure development is a critical factor for the success of rural tourism. Entrepreneurs highlight the need for improved transportation links, internet connectivity, and basic amenities to attract and retain tourists. Investments in infrastructure not only enhance the visitor experience but also support local economic development.

Rural Tourism Professionals

- 1. Challenges in the work environment:** Rural tourism professionals face several challenges in their work environment. The most prominent issues include inadequate infrastructure, deficiencies in basic services (electricity, water, internet), and accessibility problems due to transportation deficiencies. These problems negatively impact the quality of service and the tourist experience.
- 2. Need for support in digital transition:** There is a significant need for support in digital transition. Sector professionals mention the lack of training and technological resources as major obstacles. Digitalization is seen as a key tool to improve operational efficiency and tourism promotion, but it requires greater institutional support.
- 3. Lack of training and education programs:** The insufficiency of adequate training and education programs is a common concern. Professionals highlight the need for continuous training in areas such as digital marketing, ecotourism practices, and tourism experience management. Specialized training would help professionals better adapt to market demands and improve the quality of their services.
- 4. Financial support and promotion policies:** The lack of financial support and adequate promotion policies is also identified as a significant challenge. Rural tourism professionals need more resources and policies that actively promote rural tourism, especially compared to sun and beach tourism, which receives more attention and support.
- 5. Demographic challenges:** Depopulation and the difficulty in finding skilled personnel are recurring problems. Rural areas often lack a sufficient population to sustain a stable workforce, exacerbating operational and service issues in the rural tourism sector.
- 6. Interest in sustainability and experiential tourism:** Professionals show a strong interest in sustainability and experiential tourism. These areas are not only seen as important trends but also as opportunities to differentiate themselves and attract a growing segment of tourists interested in authentic and environmentally friendly experiences.

Summary

The interviews with rural tourism professionals reveal a sector facing several challenges but also full of opportunities for growth and improvement. The need to improve infrastructure, support digitalization, offer continuous training programs, and promote financial support policies are key areas identified for development. Professionals are committed to sustainability and experiential tourism, which represents a significant opportunity for the future of rural tourism.