

# STRUCTURAL EVALUATION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS RURAL TOURISM: A PROPOSED STUDY

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## **Abstract**

People are visiting rural places of interest like never before; this has garnered much interest in tourism academia. With scholastic advances in the field of sustainable tourism development over the last 4 decades, it is important that growth should be managed and measured through the paradigms of sustainable tourism development (Institutional, Economic and Environmental), that becomes the essence of this conceptual paper wherein an attempt is made to predict the attitudes of tourists towards rural destinations in order to further comprehend the economic dynamics of sustainable tourism development and its implication on rural destinations. The study aims to utilise existing epistemological aspects pertaining to the investigation of tourist behaviour, the authors have attempted to adapt the Theory of Planned Behaviour and use one of its verticals that is ‘attitude’ to study the population.

*Keywords: rural economics, sustainable tourism, tourist behaviour*

## **1 INTRODUCTION TO PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The previous two decades have been testimony to the robust changes and socioeconomic transfigurations all over the world. These transformations impacted and bore a pressure to the isolated, peripheral and rural regions of the world. According to Pattanaro (2005) and Gannon (1993) changes to the conventional economic and social compositions of rural communities resulted in depreciating farmland output levels compounded with inflated rates of unemployment leading to a mass withdrawal of productive and operational factors of agriculture. This has directly and indirectly caused an imbalance in the socioeconomic fabric of the rural areas.

It appears to be evident from various studies Kim (2001) and Hall (2009) & Park (2010), the significance of rural areas for socioeconomic development and regeneration along with the variegation of their economic foundation in order to address the changes that the modern worlds bring us. The evolution of rural tourism has impacted and changed the paradigm on the tourist demand-behaviour continuum, touristic activities based in rural areas offer the possibilities for alternative, niche and authentic avenues of tourist experiences, appealing to the “upcoming” generation of tourists, additionally Page (1997) maintains that there is a growing demand for tourism and recreational activities in the rural areas that is dissimilar from the traditional resorts and mass tourism reception regions.

Hall (2000) studied that the primary motivations behind this project is based on the fact that there has been a dramatic growth in the tourism and travel industry, conventional mechanisms of tourism development concentrated around coastal, mountainous, urban and cultural settings have yielded extensive benefits to the economy, environment and society of the local community.

However, certain regions in spite of containing a substantial quantum of tourism inventory in terms of built and natural environments are lagging behind and remain under-explored and unexploited in terms of rural based tourism activities, this increments the necessity of such

studies. Although tourist activities centring on rural areas is considered to be a relatively new attribute of tourism supply, in recent years there has been a spurt in demand for travel experiences in small villages and the countryside in various rural territories around the world, as observed by Carter (1999).

**The research aims to empirically investigate the following:**

- a) The attitudes of leisure tourists towards visitation of rural areas

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Lane (1994) explains that in the most traditional view, agriculture and forestry formed the crux of country life. This proved to be the major source of income within rural economy and indirectly had a powerful impact on conventional power equations and life styles.

Roberts (2001) observes that there exists no standard definition of the term ‘rural’ and additionally the various definitions that do exist vary not only in scale but also in philosophy, while many countries utilize specific criteria to define rurality, there is no universal agreement on the critical threshold which demarcates between urban and rural populations.

Lane (1993) maintains that although appears to be simple to define rural tourism as any activity that takes place in the countryside, it fails to consist the complexity of the activities and various forms and interpretations established in other countries, as well as the number of exponents participating in the overall framework of rural tourism.

Further ahead, Lane (1994a) notes that it is a challenge to define rural tourism as there are no theoretical bases from nodal organizations like United Nations World Tourism Organizations (UNWTO) nor the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in this regard.

Opperman (1996) through his findings has given a parallel dimension to the understanding of rural tourism wherein the author notes that, rural tourism lacks a comprehensive body of knowledge and theoretical framework, he further adds that the absence of standing theory maybe a result of the following:

- a) Definitional challenges pertaining to the constitution of rural tourism
- b) Mirroring Butler (1998) research on the topic, he argued that lack of data sources on micro level rural businesses makes rural tourism relatively less obvious and signals more meticulous efforts from researchers in the procurement of data.

The need to distinguish between rural tourism from various forms of tourism exists, to the extent that the fine line between rural tourism and urban tourism is difficult to define due to the mutual rural connotation(s). Bramwell (1994) understands that “the social representations of rural areas by the media and the perceptions of individuals for the countryside certainly create a demand for these spaces and shape consequently the distinctive form of rural tourism”.

Eminent authors like Gannon (1994) have held the fact that rural tourism consist a range of activities services and amenities provided by the farming community to attract tourists to their areas in order to generate extra income for their business.

The Commission of the European Communities (1987) describes RT as “rural tourism is a vast concept covering other services besides accommodation such as events, festivities, outdoor recreation, production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural products”.

At this juncture, Murdoch (1993) precautions researches that not every aspect of tourism in rural conditions can be considered as ‘rural’ in the most orthodox sense of understanding.

## **2.1 Retrospection the development of rural tourism as a field of study**

Interest in recreational activities at rural locations developed at the end of the 18th century as a form of ‘stressbuster’ of the rising working class. As Urry (1990) and Kelly (2015) put it, the rural settings became the “gaze” of the emerging genre of tourists and influenced the creativity of the intelligentsia. Sharply (1996) concluded that development in rural tourism is due to technological advancements, availability of leisure time and the increment in disposal income.

Harrison (1991), Deer (2010) and Ho (2005) highlight the fact that the spurt in demand took place at the end of the second world war, the primary factor remained the increase in car ownership gave an impetus to travel and tourism to rural areas. Knudson (1985) in his study devised the fact that number of tourists engaged in the scope of activities and types of rural recreation avenues that has continued to increase significantly.

## **3 SUMMARISING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

Swarbrooke (2010) in his work titled “Sustainable tourism management” highlights the fact that sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that meets the needs of the tourists, the tourism industry and host communities today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

### **3.1 Principles of Sustainable Tourism Management**

Adapting from Bramwell (1996) the following are:

- a) The approach sees policy, planning and management as appropriate, and indeed essential responses to the problems of natural and human resource misuse in tourism;
- b) The approach is generally not anti-growth, but it emphasizes that there are limitations to growth and that tourism must be managed within these limits;
- c) Long term rather than short term thinking is necessary;
- d) The concerns of sustainable tourism management are not solely environmental, but are also economic, social, cultural, political and managerial;
- e) The approach emphasizes the importance of satisfying human needs and aspirations, which entails a prominent concern for equity and fairness;
- f) All stakeholders need to be consulted and empowered in tourism decision-making, and they also need to be informed about sustainable development issues;
- g) While sustainable development should be a goal for all policies and actions, putting ideas of sustainable tourism into practice means recognizing that in reality there are often limits to what will be achieved in the short and medium term;
- h) An understanding of how market economies operate of the cultures and management procedures of private sector businesses and of public and voluntary sector organizations and of the values and attitudes of the public is necessary in order to turn good intentions into practical measures;
- i) There are frequently conflicts of interest over the use of resources, which means that in practice trade-off and compromises maybe necessary;
- j) The balancing of costs and benefits in decisions on different courses of action must extend to considering how much different individuals and groups will gain and lose.

### 3.2 Conceptualizing the inter-relation between Sustainability and Rural Tourism

Swarbrooke (2001) conceptualized the framework on sustainable tourism and attempted to study its attributes and thus the following figure emerged:

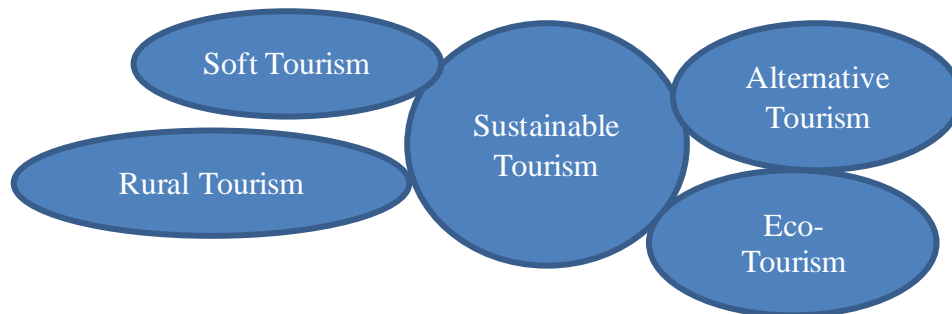


Fig. 1 – Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Tourism. Source: Swarbrooke (2001)

## 4 THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR

Icek Ajzen (1980) promulgated this theory, as an extension of the already existing Theory of Proposed Action which was propounded by him and Driver.

The notion of the behavioural intention; a person’s intention of performing a given behaviour is the best predictor of whether or not the person will actually perform the behaviour. It is based on the premise that the best predictor of an actual behaviour is the behaviour a person actually intends to do.

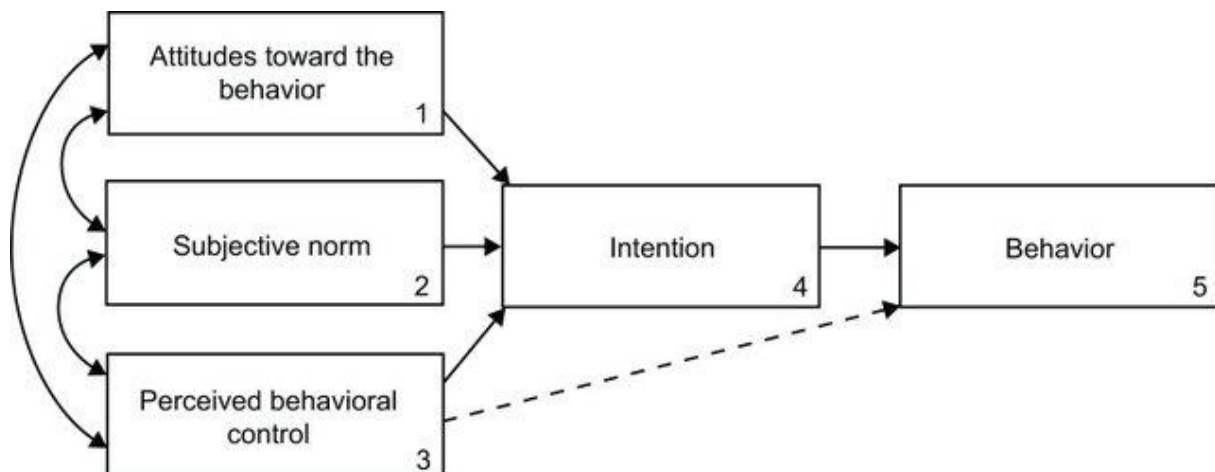


Fig. 2 – Planned behaviour. Source: Ajzen (1980)

Quintal (2010) have used the model to understand risk and uncertainty among tourists from Australia and South Korea wherein the model helped the authors to understand the perceived risk did have a positive effect on the behavior intentions of the tourists. Jalilvand (2012) in their study have employed the model to understand the fact that electronic WOM have a positive impact on the attitudes of people visiting a particular destination in Iran.

Lam (2004) were moderately successful in predicting the behavioral intentions of Chinese mainland travelers to Hong Kong. Chen (2014) tested the model to predict consumer’ intention to visit green hotels in Taiwan and the results conveyed that indeed, potential consumer’s

environmental concern do exert a positive influence on their attitudes towards green accommodation options.

Han (2017) in their study, have extended the TPB model to inculcate subjective norms and link the same with past behavior patterns to predict potential consumer behavior towards bicycle tourism in China. Horng, (2013b) developed an extended model based on the TPB to examine behavior outputs against lifestyle. The study observed different consumers portray different behavioral outputs based on their lifestyles.

## 5 ATTITUDES TOWARDS VISITATIONS TO RURAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS – A NOVEL RESEARCH TERRITORY

For the purpose of the proposed research we wish to extract a single vertical of the TPB model that is “Attitude” to contemplate the behavioural dynamics of potential tourists at rural destinations.

We wish to adopt the ABC (Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive) Model for attitude prediction as propounded by Eagly & Chaiken (1998) and extended by Van den Berg (2006), as thorough literature review has revealed that scholastic endeavors towards predicting consumers’ behavior at rural tourism destinations is lacking.

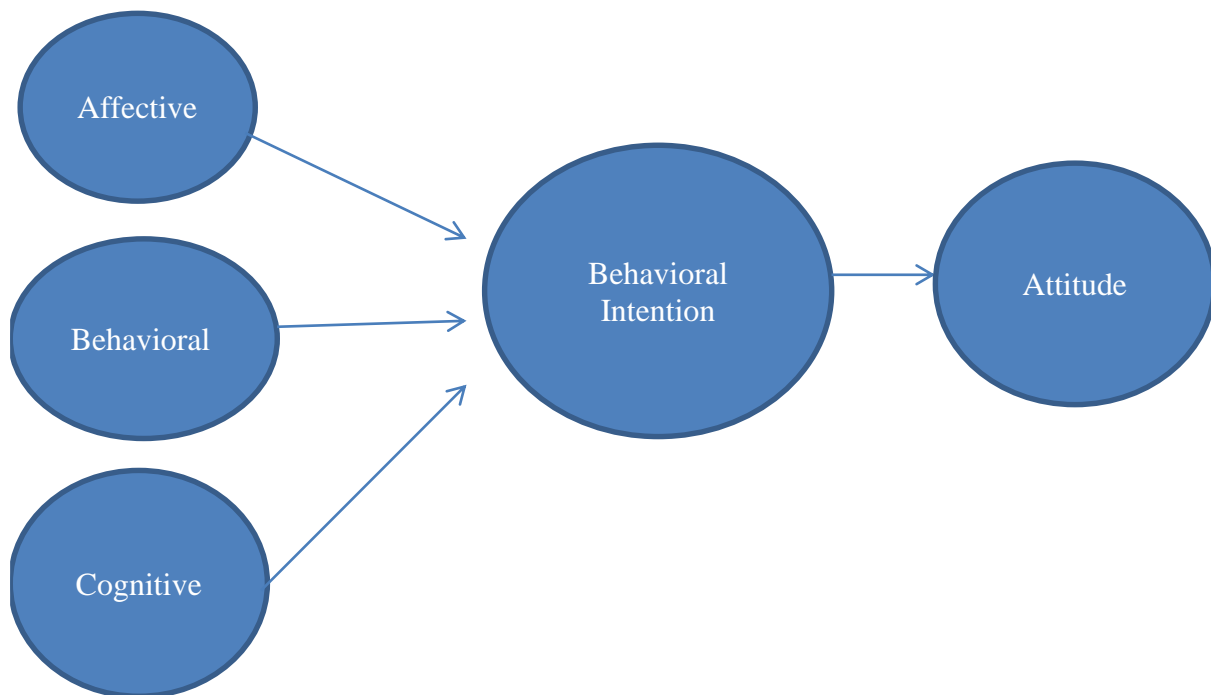


Fig. 3 – ABC Model. Source: Eagly and Chaiken (1998)

### 5.1 Defining the constructs for each variable on the ABC Model

- a) Affective: Russel (1980) demarcated the affective component into two different parts one was hedonistic (exciting/arousing, pleasant, relaxing) and the other was abstention (sleepy, distressing, unpleasant, and gloomy);
- b) Behavioural: Driver (1990) outlined the most important construct in order to study the behavioral aspect of attitude;

- c) Cognitive: Mackenzie (1986) outlined two important constructs that is knowledge objectives or awareness and the second one is reliability and confidence in a product/ service, here the product is the rural destination as also added by Patrick (2011).

## 5.2 Hypothesis to be tested

H<sub>0</sub> = “attitudes don’t influence visitation behaviour to rural areas”

## 6 THEORETICAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT

Post factor loading, the pathway schema ideally should display like below:

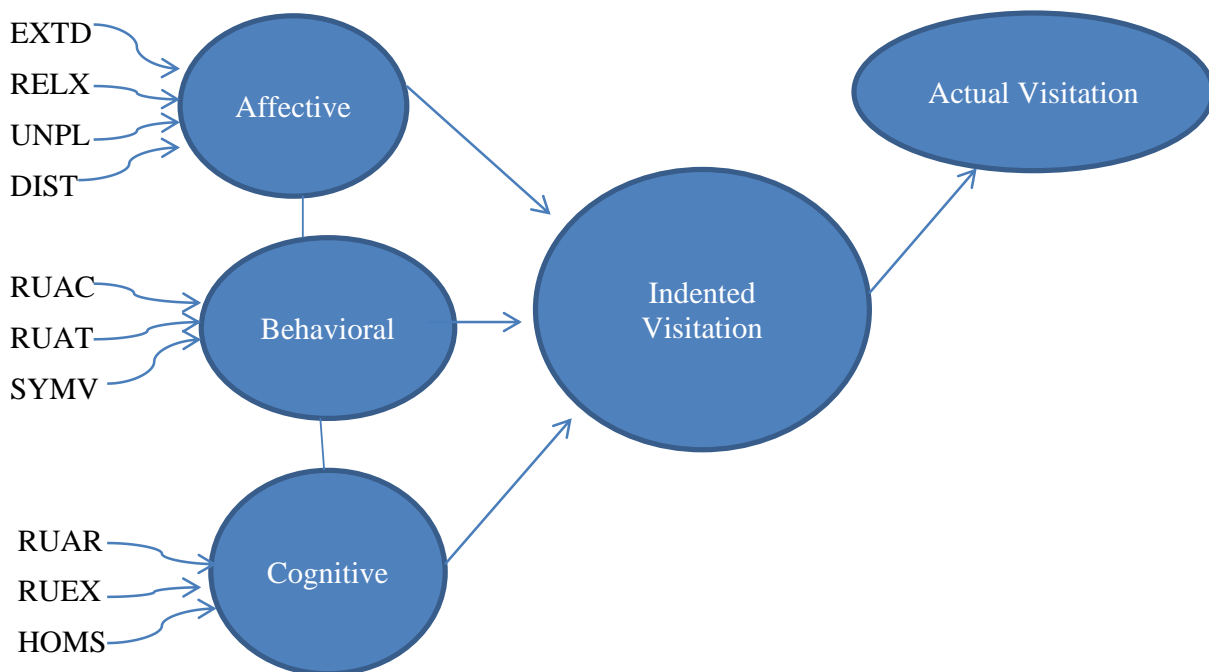


Fig. 4 – Pathway Schema. Source: Eagly and Chaiken (1998)

### 6.1 Rationalising the items on the proposed model

Tab. 1 – Rationalising the items on the proposed model. Source: own research

Variables	Constructs	Source
EXTD	Excitement, arousal, elevation	Apostolopoulou (2015)
RELX	Relaxation and rejuvenation	Devesa (2010)
UNPL	Unpleasant feelings	Gössling (2016)
DIST	Distress	Chang (2013)
RUAC	Rural activities <i>incl.</i> sports	Rid, Ezeuduji & Pröbstl-Haider (2014)
RUAT	Rural attachment <i>incl.</i> interest	Gross & Brown (2006)
SYMV	Perceived symbolic value	Josiam, Smeaton & Clements (1999)
RUAR	Knowledge of rural settings	Greaves & Skinner (2010)
RUEX	Rural experiences	Iorio & Corsale (2010)
HOMS	To gauge reliability attribute, rural homestays and accommodation have been absorbed in contrast against hotels	Acharya & Halpenny (2013)

## 7 PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the study we shall be utilizing the framework given by Churchill (1979) and Hinkin (1995) of scale development, given below:

<p><b>Step 1: Item Generation /</b> Create Items</p> <p><b>Step 2: Content Adequacy Assessment/</b>Test for conceptual consistency of items</p> <p><b>Step 3: Questionnaire Administration/</b> Determine the scale for items, identify sample size (N), administer questionnaire with other established measures</p> <p><b>Step 4: Factor Analysis/</b> Exploratory to reduce the set of items, confirmatory to test the significance of the scale</p> <p><b>Step 5: Internal Consistency Assessment/</b> Determine the convergent and criterion-related validity</p> <p><b>Step 7: Replication/</b>Repeat the scale-testing process with new data set</p>
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Fig. 5 – Scale development. Source: Churchill (1979) and Hinkin (1995)

### 7.1 Content Adequacy

Nunnally (1978) observed several content assessment methods have been described in the research methods literature. One common method requires respondents to categorize or sort items based on their similarity to construct definitions. This can be conducted using experts in a content domain. In either case, respondents are presented with construct definitions without titles and are asked to match items with a corresponding definition. An acceptable agreement index must be determined prior to administration of the items and definitions. ANOVA method will be used for content adequacy assessment.

### 7.2 Questionnaire Administration

The Likert's scale would be used to garner responses, as it continues to remain a much-preferred way of response collection in social sciences research reports (Hummer, 2011). The respondents may choose their agreement/disagreement on a five, seven or even nine point continuum.

### 7.3 Factor Analysis

Will be used to investigate variable relationships, which will help to reduce the number of items to confirm the significance of the scale.

### 7.4 Proposed Sample Size

Contemporary studies have opined that in majority of the studies an N=150 should suffice the project's outcome in exploratory factor analysis, till the time item inter-correlations are substantially robust as advised by Velicer (1988) and Bollen (1989) opines that a minimum N=100 be considered for the purpose of Confirmatory Factor Analysis. It is to be noted that, as the number of the sample increments, the potential of attaining statistical importance increases, this might deter the evolution of pragmatism in the results.

### 7.5 Exploratory Factor Analysis

The principal axis is slated to be used for the purpose of study as the principal-constituent methodology of assessment amounts for generic, specific and random error variances, this decision is supported by the likes of eminent authors like Ford (1986) and Rummel (1970). There may be two circumstances here during the EFA stage of the research with the remedy:

- a) Variables are uncorrelated: orthogonal rotation;

- b) If variables are showing correlation: oblique rotation.

## 7.6 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This is a measure to check the goodness of fit for multi-variate analysis of differing models.

A chi-square analysis will be used to evaluate the goodness-of-fit of the evolved model at the same time, assess the disparity- in- goodness among two other models (Destination Emotional Scale & Sustainable Tourism Measurement Model)

## 7.7 Internal Consistency Assessment

Reliability may be assessed through multiple methodologies, but as Mueller (1986) suggests Cronbach's  $\alpha$  will be utilized to scrutinize the scale's internal consistency. The very reason for me to use the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is that the paths show us through a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) procedure how well the items gauge the same constructs. This will be undertaken post the CFA and the EFA when all the redundant items are deleted, the internal reliabilities will be calculated. According to Churchill (1979) "A large coefficient alpha provides an indication of strong item covariance or homogeneity and suggests that the sampling domain has adequately been captured."

## 7.8 Construct Validity

At this stage the evolved scale should be able to gauge content validity and internal consistency reliability. Here we will study about the convergent validity: to check if the other measures can evaluate similar constructs and discriminant validity: to gauge the fact that the constructs don't correlate with dissimilar measures. This has to be done in order to investigate relationships with factors that are theorized to be the end-results of the focal assessment (otherwise known as criterion-related validity)

### Actor Groups

Three major groups have been identified through the implications of the New Ecology Paradigm of Dunlap (2000).

- a) The tourists (not visitors): minimum stay for more than 24 hrs and consumption of local experience (UNWTO);
- b) Local community in rural regions;
- c) Political Administrators: Destination Management Organizations (DMO), Visitor Management Bureaus, Tourism and Travel Authority, Accommodation Operators, Transport Federation.

## 8 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

- a) **Sustainability in action:** sustainable tourism development has to be revived in the rural heartlands so that along with development there is growth with equity and that propagation is synchronized with the UNWTO goals, this study will mobilize opinion and measure them in order to establish sustainable growth patterns;
- b) **Prevention of Over tourism:** acclaimed writers like C. Michael Hall have expressively cautioned against mass tourism in the most ecologically delicate of regions, this study will also highlight how sustainable rural tourism can make a difference in the regional map;



- c) **Preservation of the indigenous culture:** the paper will demonstrate how “culture” is a working component of “rural attractiveness” and will offer methods to prevent any form of cultural erosion and loss of the destination genuine;
- d) **Sustainability awareness:** the literature aims to promote the ethos of sustainability among the different stakeholders of the tourism and travel industry of the region;
- e) **A better understanding of the rural tourism industry:** our study wishes to engage the competent tourism authorities in the development of rural tourism infrastructure and organize the tourism supply chain so that holistic destinations maybe developed that may not only provide more opportunities but raise standards of living;
- f) **Rural Circuits Development:** through findings (especially surveys), the paper purports the establishment of a comprehensive network of destinations bearing rural attractiveness at a particular region. Such destinations may be mapped on the basis of relative attractiveness and/or geographical proximity;
- g) **Addition of sustainable inventories:** My paper would also investigate multimodal avenues to incorporate sustainable tourism inventories like wine walks, heritage tours, organic camping, rural adventure tourism activities, country-side cycling in popular tourism itineraries;
- h) **Promote the concept of Culinary, Food and Farm Tourism (CFFT):** this is a contemporary practice in the tourism industry which my paper wishes to put impetus on through the study. As farms and agro based tourism experiences find their roots in rural settings, products like farm familiarization tours, organic farm visits, farm-to-plate concept, local culinary camps etc. will also be studied;
- i) **Advising on demand:** the study will provide an idea of the demographic and psychographic (allocentric, mid-centric and psychocentric) configuration of the incoming tourist to rural regions, which may be utilized to establish marketing strategies for the regions.;
- j) **Women Empowerment:** The study will focus on the emancipation of women through deliberations in the tourism trade;
- k) Competency Building among the local community.

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