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Evaluating the impact of agritourism on local development in small islands

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ABSTRACT: Tourism is an activity encompassing economy, society and nature. Besides mass tourism, many different forms of tourism activities and products have developed and are gaining ground in terms of demand. Debates on the definition of such typically small scale activities have brought forward a number of different types, including 'agrotourism', 'agri-tourism' and 'rural tourism'. This paper contributes to the conceptual analysis of agritourism with a focus on its effects on local development. After a brief historical sketch of agritourism development, the effects on local development found in the literature are presented. Then, a typology of different forms of agritourism is discussed, including aspects of supply and demand, the scale of operation of the enterprises and networks of enterprises related to agritourism. Finally, we explore the case of small islands, a special type of space, and their local development with these types of 'alternative' tourism activities alongside 'conventional' tourism. The conceptual framework that results suggests the need for a case and area specific mapping of type, scale and network of enterprises in order to determine impacts and provide important information for managing and planning agritourism, especially on islands.

Keywords: agritourism, local development, networks, scale, islands

Introduction

The role of tourism in local economic development is a topic of critical importance (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014), starting from the 1980s (Barquero, 1991). By 'local development', we mean endogenous development: that is, the sustainable utilization of local resources, associated with the promotion of local economic base diversification, rural 'multi-functionality' (Barquero, 1991; Iosifides & Politidis, 2005, p. 497), and the appropriation of benefits to local populations. The content of endogenous development is related to local developmental potential and is based on building competitiveness from local resources and local participation; but is also characterized by dynamic interactions between local areas and their wider environments, through networks of local and extra local actors (Bosworth, Annibal,

Carroll, Price, Sellick & Shepherd, 2015). Ward, Atterton, Kim, Lowe, Phillipson & Thompson (2005, p.5) explain that,

> … the key to local development is building a local institutional capacity able both to mobilize internal resources and to cope with the external forces acting on a region. This perspective emphasizes not only that economic or business development needs to be embedded in the region, but that the means of achieving this objective is through participation of local actors in internal and external development processes.

Besides 'endogenous' local development approaches, the role of tourism has been recognized as central for providing alternative income opportunities to farm households (Kizos, 2010) within the 'rural development' context in the 1990s (van der Ploeg, Renting, Brunori, Knickel, Mannion, Marsden, de Roest, Sevilla-Guzmán, & Ventura, 2000; van der Ploeg & Renting, 2004). Another role of tourism is the creation of synergies between different activities (Koutsouris, Gidarakou, Kokkali & Dimopoulou, 2013), not only at farm level but also between different farms or farms and other rural activities. This rural development framework involves increasing the value of the product generated by the agricultural enterprise by constructing new linkages with markets that, as yet, are disconnected from or inaccessible to farmers (van der Ploeg et al., 2000). Although many different names where given to these forms of tourism services (see below), they are generally referred to as 'agritourism'.

References to the importance of agritourism have increased lately, but its implications to local economic development have so far been little explored (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). This paper contributes to the gap in the literature by proposing a framework that can evaluate the impact of agritourism on local development processes, especially those on islands. The analysis follows three steps. In the first, a brief historical sketch of agritourism development and the effects on local development found in the literature are presented. Then, a typology of different forms of agritourism is discussed including aspects of supply and demand, taking into consideration the scale of operation of the enterprises along with networks of enterprises associated with agritourism. With this typology we seek to understand the type of supply and its spatial patterns. The concentration of agritourism supply (e.g. networks of businesses) are potentially important in the context of broader development strategies in rural areas (Che, Veeck & Veeck, 2005; Flanigan, Blackstock & Hunter, 2015) presented *from below*: (from enterprises to networks), compared to more conventional strategies *from above* (from networks to enterprises) presentations. Finally, we explore the case of small islands, a special type of space, and local development on them with these types of 'alternative' tourism activities alongside 'conventional' tourism.

'Agro', 'agri' or 'rural' tourism: a review of conceptual changes

By the 1980s, Middleton (1982) had made the link between the massive, popular movement or 'consumption' of rural areas and the notion of 'the good life' that had developed in the 1960s and 1970s. This conceptual shift was associated with the 'rediscovery' of the rural in the 1980s. Rural spaces have traditionally been associated with specific economic, social and environmental functions: agriculture, sparsely populated areas, geographically dispersed settlement patterns and 'nature', among others (Page & Getz, 1997). Their 'rediscovery' was linked with rising living standards and motor car ownership, mostly for the middle class and skilled manual workers and higher income groups. Smith, Hetherington & Brumbaugh (1986)

parallel this emerging interest in rural tourism within the United States with the recognition of tourism as a form of economic development that stimulated World Bank investments in resorts and tourism projects for developing regions in the 1970s. This led to an increasing recognition of tourism development in rural communities based on the expansion and marketing of outdoor recreation opportunities (Perdue, Long & Allen, 1987). Early rural tourism was mainly characterized by small, scattered and unorganized enterprises (Gilbert, 1989), but studies suggested it could contribute to local socio-economic development as an 'alternative' solution to sub-employment in rural areas (Gidarakou, Xenou, & Theofilou, 2000).

There seems to be a growing consensus that rural tourism is a broader spatial term encompassing a diversity of activities offered in rural settings (Hegarty & Przezborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Koutsouris, Gidarakou, Grava & Michailidis, 2014; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) reflect this consensus by conceiving agritourism as any practice, activity or service developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors which includes a wide variety of activities, e.g., tours, overnight stays, special events and festivals, on-farm stores, fee fishing and hunting, bird-watching, hiking, horse-riding, and self-recreational harvesting.

The importance of tourism in development at the national and local levels increases in the literature, among other approaches as a so-called 'pro-poor strategy' (Ashley & Roe, 2002), or through externally driven processes as a major replacement of other economic activities (Saarinen, 2007; 2014). Critical to the success of such undertakings is the degree to which a locality can market itself to potential investors and tourists through 'place marketing' in order to achieve tourism-based economic growth. Identifying and marketing new conceptualizations of space and place is key in this regard, with activities such as festivals, heritage sites and capitalization on locally available natural resources (Binns & Nel, 2002). Agritourism is increasingly being viewed as a 'desirable diversifier' in this context for local and regional economies, not least because one positive externality of tourism growth is its role in increasing the supply of local services as well as the less obvious social contribution of tourism to expanding local leisure spaces, especially in marginalized, peripheral regions (Butler & Rogerson, 2016).

Among locals, tourism development and agritourism is positively labeled, with such employment often regarded as a 'good job', although achieving these aspirations requires a good fit between the types of service which tourists demand and those which local people are willing to provide (Ashley, Roe, & Goodwin, 2000). Successful examples in Tuscany and Umbria prove that the consolidation of rural tourism and certified quality foods can provide alternatives to a sense of remoteness in less favored rural areas (Galluzzo, 2015). The challenge is how such agritourism can contribute to local and regional revival and intersect with other non-tourism initiatives (Saarinen, 2003; 2007). A summary of the possible effects of agritourism on local development includes local job creation, provision of additional incomes, labour gap filling, local cooperative development, plus empowerment and control, especially for women through the distribution of new skills, sources of income and qualifications (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2008; Goodwin, 2008).

As for tourism in general, positive economic impacts of agritourism can be direct, including supplementing individual earnings, community income and non-financial elements such as improved infrastructure; indirect or secondary, including increased earnings from non-tourism sectors linked to tourist activities; and dynamic or induced, e.g., tourism workers' consumption (Butler, & Rogerson, 2016, for multiplier effects see also Cooper et al., 2008).

But, what is agritourism today? The exploration of definitions and conceptualizations provides a rough guide to the type of approach taken to map agritourism as an economic activity, a social practice and a growing industry. Relevant studies tend to focus on agritourism supply (e.g. Flanigan, Blackstock & Hunter, 2014; 2015; McGehee, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004; McGehee, Kim, & Jennings, 2007; Nickerson, Black & McCool, 2001; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). In general, most of the available research is related to the types of farms and the services and products offered. Less research considers agritourism demand. Fotiadis and Vassiliadis (2010) discuss the expectations of rural tourists in order to suggest strategies for hosts to meet these expectations, while Chatzigeorgiou, Christou, Kassianidis & Sigala (2009) examine customer satisfaction. Even fewer studies address both supply and demand, a notable exception being the work of Flanigan et al. (2014; 2015). They adapt a typology offered by Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock (2010) for defining agritourism with the use of three criteria: (a) the nature of contact between tourists and agricultural activity (the tangibility of agriculture in the context of visitor experiences of agritourism, Flanigan et al., 2014); (b) whether or not the product is based on a 'working farm' (the most frequently cited requirement for agritourism for both North American and European studies, e.g. Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Hegarty & Przezborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Thomas-Francois & Francois, 2014); and (c) the degree of authenticity in the tourism experience. Gil Arroyo, Barbieri & Rich (2013) suggest a fourth ontological issue, related to 'travel' given the inclusion of the word 'tourism' in the term agritourism. With the use of these criteria, five different types of agritourism emerge (see Figure 1).

(i) Non-working farm indirect interaction agritourism (NWFII): are not physically based on working farms but make a connection to agriculture or agricultural heritage in terms of imagery or location rather than having a direct connection to farm animals, crops, machinery, or processes (e.g. former farm house accommodation),

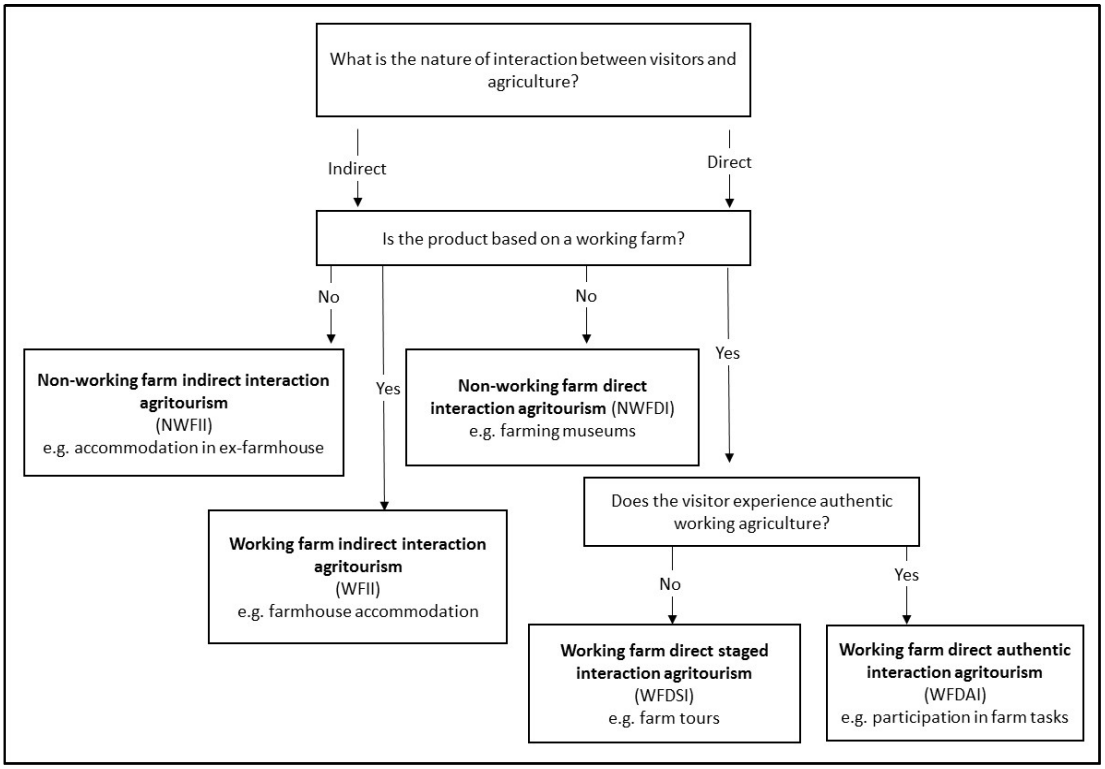
(ii) Non-working farm direct interaction agritourism (NWFDI): based in off-farm or ex-farm locations, such as farming demonstrations, farm heritage attractions, agricultural shows, and agricultural sales marts,

(iii) Working farm indirect interaction agritourism (WFII): include farm-based accommodation (e.g. farmhouse bed and breakfast, self-catering cottages, camping sites); farm shops, cafés and food-processing attractions; outdoor activities (e.g. horse riding, country field sports); leisure facilities (e.g. golf driving ranges, fishing ponds, bike tracks); and visitor attractions (e.g. children's play parks, nature attractions) based on farm land,

(iv) Working farm direct staged interaction agritourism (WFDSI): direct interaction with agriculture, whereby interaction with farm animals, crops, machinery, or processes are 'staged' (i.e. reproduced or organized) for the benefit of tourism (e.g., such as farm attractions, open farms and farm tours),

(v) Working farm direct authentic interaction agritourism (WFDAI): visitors have an authentic working involvement in the farm and ultimately make a physical investment in the farm economy (e.g. participation in farm tasks).

Figure 1: A typology for defining agritourism (adopted from Flanigan et al., 2014; 2015).



What this analysis brings forward are some qualitative and quantitative differentiations of agritourism compared to previous practices and conceptualizations. Quantitatively, it has grown into a booming industry with more enterprises, more activities, more areas and more people involved. The five different types examined above indicate that agritourism is no longer just an activity where farmers provide accommodation and modest tourism services to nearby urbanites who have come to enjoy and experience farm life. It is increasingly a tourism activity linked with mass tourism destinations, practices and enterprises. Such enterprises that offer agritourism services are often luxurious and aim for high-end consumers. Qualitatively, the services involved in agritourism products are offered more often in smaller packages of agritourism experience and not from the same enterprises. Some enterprises offer accommodation only, others offer services only, more and more often involving 'agritourism professionals' rather than farmers. New technologies in communicating, branding and marketing allow agritourism to reach a wider audience, while travelers can now book themselves, compare and evaluate services and enterprises. This has increased the need for "professionals in the tourism sector" rather than just farmers who used to supplement their farm income from a couple of tourists. All these developments have fundamentally changed the way agritourism as an activity must be evaluated at the area level. We turn our interest to this in the following section.

Towards a conceptual framework for assessing the impact of agritourism activities: scale and networks

An aspect of agritourism that may have been overlooked is the actual impact of the activity in its socioeconomic setting. Two issues are of importance here: (a) the scale of operation of the enterprises; and (b) cooperation networks of the enterprises at different levels and the proportion of added value of the activity that is gained locally. These aspects are discussed in the following sections.

Scale

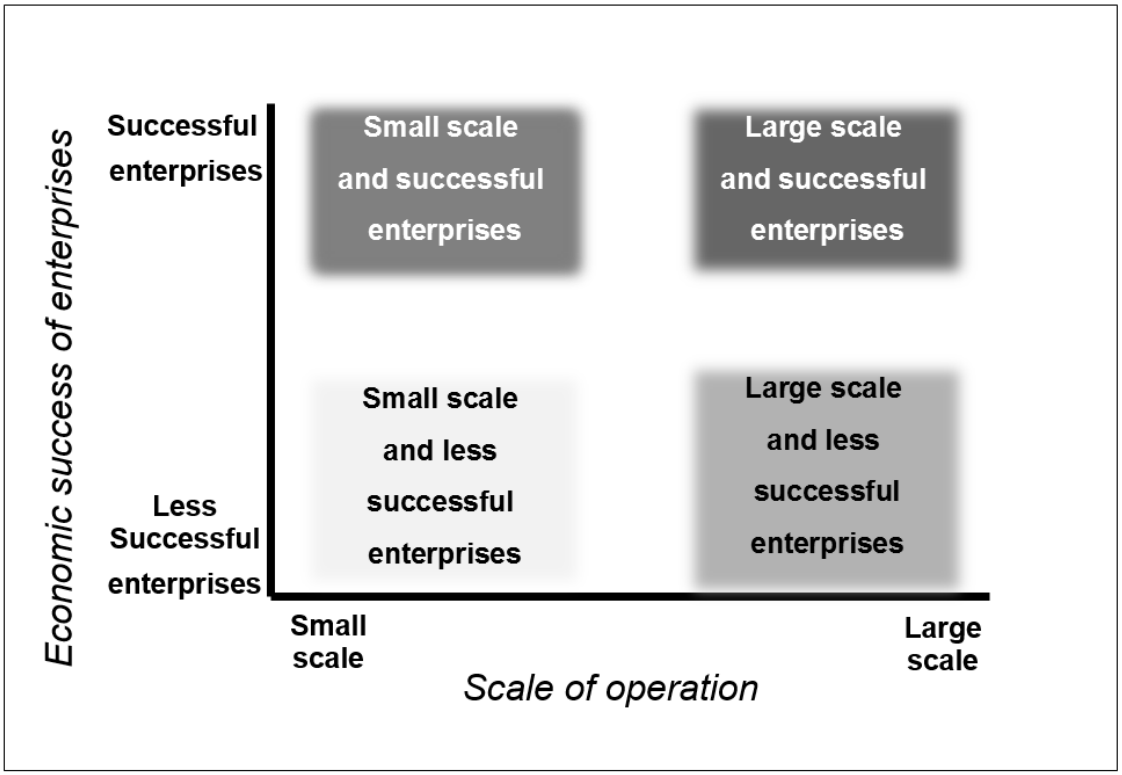
The scale of operation of the enterprises that provide agritourism is very important in assessing their economic, social and environmental impacts at the area level. Two aspects must be considered (adapted from Kizos & Vakoufaris, 2011a; Kizos & Vakoufaris, 2011b): (a) the economic success of the individual agritourism enterprises and (b) their scale of operation.

The success of the enterprises that provide the product can vary from the unsuccessful (that is, enterprises that barely survive or will have to close), to successful and competitive ones. Success here is relative, as it may refer to different enterprises while taking into account the particularities of the sector or the area. It can involve viable or competitive and profitable processing/marketing enterprises, but can also involve enterprises that are not viable as separate enterprises, but provide their owners with additional income in pluri-active farm households (Kizos, 2010). The scale of operation can vary from the very small to the very large and is again relative and related to the size of the sector locally, as large scale for one area may be small for another. The combination yields a number of different cases (Figure 2) with a range of scales of operation and relative successes. Mapping the enterprises in an area provides a first rough estimation of the impacts at the area level. Adaptation of this approach to specific localities with specific ways to measure success and scale of operation can offer a more complete picture.

Networks

Most modern theoretical approaches to regional development agree on the importance of networks, clusters and other forms of the cooperation enhancing the competitiveness of businesses and regions. More specifically, in the tourism sector different types of tourism components (activities) are provided by different service providers. The need for collaboration, cooperation and coordination between these service providers in producing successful (agri)tourism products suggests that tourism enterprises are no longer autonomous entities, but are rather more and more often parts of long tourism supply chains (Huang, Song & Zhang, 2010; 2012). Che et al. (2005) examine the role of networks (that is, the links among farmers) in agritourism performance, concluding that entrepreneurs who have partners perform better than those who opt to offer their products individualistically and foster connections among several tourism actors (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008).

Figure 2: Theoretical categories of the impact of agritourism enterprises on the area based on the economic success of enterprises and scale of operation.



Source: Adapted from Kizos & Vakoufaris (2011a, p. 707).

In the literature, the words 'networks' and 'clusters' are often used interchangeably (e.g. Soteriades, Tyrogala & Varvaressos, 2009) However, clusters are more than a network of businesses located in the same area and the co-location of enterprises does not guarantee economies of scale or scope (Michael, 2007; Weidenfeld, Butler & Williams, 2011). Theoretical approaches to the definition and evaluation of clusters (Abrham, 2014) in the tourism, agriculture and food sectors point to the existence of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal clustering (Buhalis & Cooper, 1998; Michael, 2007; Weidenfeld et al., 2011), amongst which 'diagonal clustering' is the one most applicable to tourism, where each additional enterprise in a concentration of complementary (or symbiotic) enterprises adds value to the products and services produced by the existing enterprises. In the context of regional development it is the growth of complementary activities (or the breadth of product offerings) that generates economies of scope and accelerates wealth and employment opportunities, while for tourism development it is often the range of product choice that helps determine destination sustainability.

Although the concept of networks is not tourism-specific, the increasing interconnection between private stakeholders and public organizations specifically in tourism deserves greater attention (Brás, Costa & Buhalis, 2010; 2012; Michael, 2007). A tourism enterprise has connections not only with its suppliers and customers but also with its surrounding community and extended environment (Ehsan, 2012) across various levels (e.g.,

local, regional, global), forms (e.g., informal, formal) and purposes (e.g., economic, social) and are of great importance for destinations. Tourism clusters may not necessarily be related to Porter's (1998) industrial clusters, but instead to functional clusters, based on thematic segmentation such as heritage, adventure or sport tourism, with members collaborating by forming value chain 'packages' and working in synergy to provide an inclusive experience to specific targeted markets, and thus tend to emerge in a rather limited geographical area (Weidenfeld et al., 2011). They also appear to provide the grounds for local players to act together in order to create a critical mass and build a local destination image (Partalidou & Koutsou, 2012). Such tourism clusters are locally and socially embedded; they are described as symbiotic between local products and land, producers and consumers, rural traditions and authenticity (Sonnino, 2007, see also Brás et al., 2010; 2012 for other examples).

Mapping and graphically depicting nodes and links between nodes has been used recently to display network qualities, such as the appearance (or not) of important actors and the density of links (Brás et al., 2010, 2012; Hidalgo, Ther, Saavedra & Díaz, 2015; Huggins & Thompson, 2015; Karlsson, 2008). But while there are many such studies concerning the tourism sector (e.g. EMPOST-NET, 2001; Fadeeva, 2005; Huang et al, 2010; 2012; Michael, 2007; Weidenfeld et al., 2011), there are few for agritourism networks (e.g. Abrham, 2014; Koutsouris, 1998; Partalidou & Koutsou, 2012; Soteriades et al., 2009).

Che et al. (2005) point out that the survival of individual businesses in the agritourism industry depends on their working together. This in turn requires a critical mass of operators so that an area can develop a place-based identity for tourists. If customers have a positive experience at one farm or agritourism destination, it carries over and reflects on agritourism and farming as a whole. Early research also considers non-formal networking as critical, with links among individuals, private and public services in order to facilitate procedures as well as to develop a common view of the future (Koutsouris, 1998; Zarokosta & Koutsouris, 2014).

This analysis leads to the need to record quantitative and qualitative aspects of these networks comprehensively. Quantitative aspects include: the number of links, the spatial extent of each link, the type of exchange over the link, its "thickness" (i.e., how much is exchanged), the duration of the link and issues of seasonality. Qualitative aspects include the type of relationship of the actors over the link and who (if anyone) has "control" over this relationship, and the amount of social capital invested in the link.

Agritourism and/ in islands: towards a research agenda

Where do islands enter into this picture? We will discuss the case of islands at three different levels: (a) islands as very important tourism destinations where agritourism is rapidly developing and 'complementing' mass tourism; (b) islands as ideal laboratories for applying the approach described above; and (c) islands as special cases in agritourism, due to accessibility patterns.

Tourism is very important in islands and for islands. Different types of tourism take advantage of geographic characteristics, such as being located in warm and cold waters (Baldacchino, 2013); size and population differences, and political status. Many islands, particularly in the tropics, have focused on tourism and reached a state where tourism has become one of the most important pillars of their economy (Gössling & Wall, 2007) attracting significant numbers of tourists (Sharpley, 2002). Many reasons have been offered for this

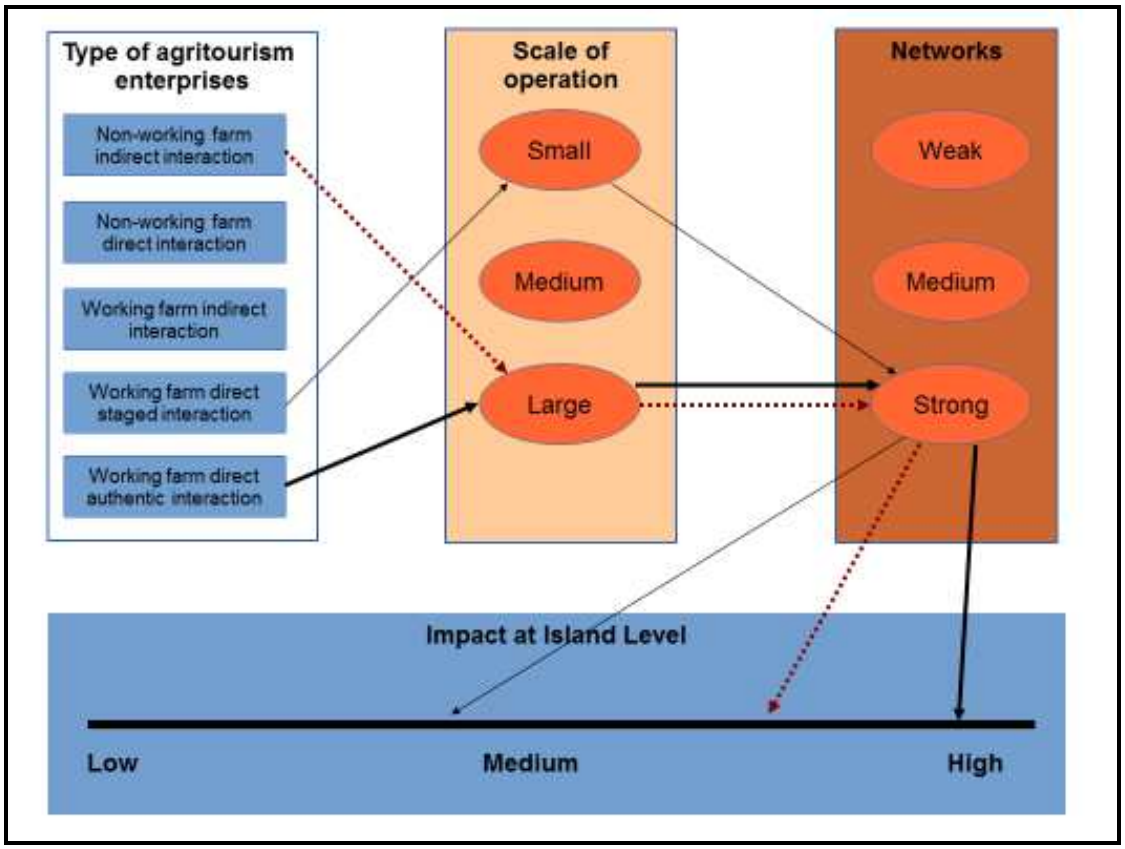
tourism attractiveness (Sharpley, 2002), including 'authentic' cultural and natural experiences in unique settings (Carlsen & Butler, 2011). Associated with notions of remoteness, separateness, difference and the exotic, they are the ideals of romance and adventure, of fantasy and escape, of otherness (Butler & Carlsen, 2011).

Recent work on agritourism (Barbieri, 2013; Barbieri, Xu, Gil Arroyo, & Rozier, 2015; Gao, Barbieri & Valdivia, 2014; Gil Arroyo et al., 2013; Koutsouris et al., 2014; Wright & Annes, 2014) has largely ignored islands, and especially small islands, as important agritourism destinations. Some early studies refer to activities such as women's cooperatives and their contribution to 'agro-tourism' (Anthopoulou, Iakovidou, Koutsouris & Spilanis, 1998; Iakovidou & Turner; 1995; Kazakopoulos & Gidarakou, 2003) while Vakoufaris, Kizos, Spilanis, Koulouri & Zacharaki (2007) explore women's contributions to local development on various Greek islands. An evaluation of agritourism on islands is offered for a Greek island by Gousiou, Spilanis & Kizos (2001), but this was more 'tourism' than 'agri', as confirmed by Kizos & Iosifides (2007) and Koutsouris et al. (2014). They all agree that even if the activity appears to improve incomes, most of the 'agro-tourist' holdings operate in the margin of mass tourism with the same customers and the same product, without clear links to local agricultural production, local products, environment and cultural landscapes. Links between the enterprises and other local actors are limited and in the Flanigan et al. (2014) typology, almost all enterprises would be characterized as falling in the NWFII type. Based upon research into the development of 'agrotourism' on Cyprus, Sharpley (2002) highlights the challenges and problems encountered by rural tourism entrepreneurs in a context dominated by mass tourism operators. Pulina, Dettori & Paba (2006) discuss the case of Sardinia where a strong policy and administrative structure allows the development of many rural tourism enterprises and activities. Other examples are from Platania (2014) for Sicily and Thomas-Francois & Francois (2014) for Grenada.

Early agritourism typically concerned short-visit activities (Phillip et al., 2010). Since accessibility was of high importance for these kind of activities it should come as no surprise that islands were not among the early agritourism destinations. For islands, accessibility is a key issue (Karampela, Kizos, & Spilanis, 2014) and an important factor for the number of tourists who are likely to visit, but also for the type of tourists, the duration of stay (Butler, 1996) and consequently for their impact on the destination.

Two developments have changed this and have increased the relevance of islands for agritourism. The first is the coupling of agritourism activities and enterprises with other types of tourism and especially forms of mass tourism, while the second refers to the increase in demand for agritourism. Another reason is that islands are characterized by a "cultural capital" that is typically linked with the development of alternative tourism products, as compared to mass tourism. These include land and sea management systems that preserve local products and recipes but have also co-shaped their cultural landscapes. Isolation and a location at the crossroads interfaces different cultures, materials and peoples (Baldacchino, 2015). Imagination is the only limitation as to what can be incorporated into agritourism today and islands are privileged symbolic entities.

Figure 3: **Impact at island level of agritourism enterprises and their networks according to type of enterprise, scale of operation and network qualities: three hypothetical trajectories.**



Source: the authors.

Therefore, islands are perfect laboratories for studying the impacts of agritourism. Besides their 'usual' characteristics (finite and discernible limits, relatively small size, facilitating recording of inflows and outflows) (Constantakopoulou, 2012), they are also very relevant in the approach suggested here. They have benefited from the rise of agritourism and conceptual change suggested in the literature: from a small scale and farmer-oriented activity to a larger scale activity conducted mostly by diverse professionals (including farmers) incorporating different services and integrating the agritourism experience with other tourism products.

The research agenda proposed needs to (a) characterize actors that are involved in agritourism in an area across the typology spectrum (Figure 1), (b) map links with other actors in the area: farmers, processors, other tourism service providers, etc, (c) incorporate scale and the success of these enterprises (Figure 2), and (d) integrate scale, success and qualities of the links (reach in space, thickness, duration, etc.) at the area – island level. This agenda can not only integrate different tools for evaluating local island-based development, but also serve as a rallying point for studying, understanding, managing and planning tourism at the island level.

Thus, assessing the impact of a specific tourism activity, namely agritourism, on a local island economy needs to combine these different aspects: the types of agritourism enterprises,

their scale of operation and the networks with other local businesses. The conceptual framework that results (Figure 3) demonstrates the need for a case and area specific mapping of all these aspects to determine impacts. Many different trajectories are possible and can lead to different outcomes, as the hypothetical examples in Figure 3 show. For example, even enterprises that are indirectly related to agriculture in the area and operate as non-working farms (type I in the agritourism typology) can be large in size and operate throughout the year with thick and dense networks with other actors of the area (e.g. farms, processing enterprises, other tourism activities), resulting in a higher impact on the local island economy than enterprises that operate on working farms and have direct interaction with agriculture (a more "pure" form of agritourism) that are smaller in scale of operation (Figure 3). This research agenda of a case to case mapping can illustrate different pathways of local development at the island level and provide important information for managing and planning agritourism on islands.

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