

LANDSCAPE DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR AGRI-TOURISM SITES

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ABSTRACT

Current financial and national crisis creates a strong urgency to promote our local culture and resources. Thus some agricultural sectors explore alternative ways in the industry of agriculture, such as super foods or previously overlooked traditional ways of production for native products. Agritourism and more broadly rural tourism offer the opportunity to the current farmer and tourism entrepreneur to maintain or increase their income and preserve their natural resources, by maintaining their lifestyle. On the other hand, tourists and farm customers are looking for interactive experiences close to home that will help them get back to their roots. Modern consumers are not only looking for local, fresh, organically or naturally grown products, but are also interested in farm culture and agricultural heritage. Hence, agritourism offers them the opportunity to engage in interactive educational and outdoor activities.

Agritourism was empirically applied in Greece from 1970 and more systematically in the '80s due to European funding for rural development; its true sense however was never served. Quite often the terms of *agrotourism*, *agritourism* and *rural tourism* are confused and *agritourism* is substituting all of them. *Rural tourism* was more focused on new accommodation facilities and not so on products and activities in the farm. However, tourists did not stay in farms and did not gain experiences of the farmer's everyday lives. Rural activities were not designed in order to help the rural development and the promotion of Greek countryside. Most of them so called *agrotouristic*, *agritouristic* facilities served mass tourism instead of rural tourism. Therefore, agricultural landscape has changed and most of the land was exploited for housing and other uses at an alarming rate, resulting to the loss of main farmland near all major cities and close to many rural towns. Consequently, it was clear that for rural tourism activities to have a prospective and to develop, a rational and safe planning process is necessary. Under this scope, landscape potential of a field should be first of all determined, while the activities that could be performed and the implementation areas should be then decided.

The main goal of this paper was to highlight the importance of landscape planning and design of rural areas and more specific of agritourism farms, as well as to present the methodological procedure for the extraction of landscape guidelines. This research had four objectives, which were:

- 1) To analyse the importance of landscape design and planning for the sustainable development of agritourism facilities.
- 2) To form a landscape design methodology, adapted to agritourism related activities in Greece.
- 3) To present guidelines for landscape design, which landscape architects, planners and geographers can use as a guide in designing agritourism activities and elements.
- 4) To investigate how the above guidelines apply to well know agritourism examples in Greece and abroad.

In order to fulfill the above objectives, a) a detailed literature review was conducted and selective examples from worldwide were selected, b) a landscape analysis was performed, in order to gather specific place elements which are important for the promotion of agritourism, as well as habits, requests and perceptions of visitors and entrepreneurs, c) a broad classification of agritourism activities concluded to a proposed zoning, d) issues related to design of agritourism sites and the works of landscape architect were introduced and e) landscape design guidelines were presented in order to highlight the importance of planning and landscape design of agritourism facilities.

The results obtained in this research were principle landscape guidelines which referred to the five basic categories of land use zoning (outdoor recreation, education, on-farm direct marketing, accommodation, and entertainment), to the types of landscape elements, the facilities and services, the accessibility and safety, the attractiveness of the place and its integration to the surrounding landscape and to the environmental care (energy saving and environmental impact).

In conclusion, this research developed clear and simple guidelines which could guarantee the tourist's satisfaction on the design and create the uniqueness and sustainable agri-tourism. The results of the present paper highlight the significant role of landscape planning of rural areas.

Keywords: agritourism, rural tourism landscape design, planning, landscape guidelines, sustainable development