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ORIGINAL

Prospects for the development of rural tourism in China in the context of the One Belt, One Road initiative

Perspectivas de desarrollo del turismo rural en China en el contexto de la iniciativa Una Franja, Una Ruta

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the modern world is experiencing an unflagging interest in rural tourism, causing its consideration as a powerful tool of international economic strategies for the development of local communities, preserving national traditions and ensuring sustainable economic growth of regions.

Aims: the study's goal is to examine the features and promotion trends of Chinese rural tourism in the context of the One Belt, One Road program.

Method: to achieve the research objectives, the following methods were used: axiomatic, hypothetico-deductive, comparative.

Results: the results of the work determined that China's One Belt, One Road initiative acts not just as an economic project, but also as a platform for cultural and social exchange between countries. Within its framework, rural tourism has become a tool to energize local economies. Traditional handicrafts, agro-tourism, and attractions attract tourists, contributing to job creation and increasing local incomes. The study found that rural tourism is becoming a key area of focus for the programme, as infrastructure facilities targeting the tourist flow are being developed, encouraging regions to be active in this area. Increased attention is paid to the sustainable development of rural tourism. This not only preserves natural resources, but also helps to maintain and popularize the cultural heritage of the regions. Despite a number of achievements, there are also challenges such as inconsistency of standards, service problems and insufficient infrastructure development in remote areas.

Conclusions: based on the analysis, it can be argued that rural tourism in China will continue to grow, especially with the support of government initiatives.

Keywords: International Cooperation; Sustainable Promotion; Farmers; Local Residents; Cultural Heritage.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el turismo rural despierta un interés incansable en el mundo moderno, lo que hace que se lo considere una herramienta poderosa de las estrategias económicas internacionales para el desarrollo de las comunidades locales, la preservación de las tradiciones nacionales y la garantía del crecimiento económico sostenible de las regiones.

Objetivos: el objetivo del estudio es examinar las características y tendencias de promoción del turismo rural chino en el contexto del programa "Un Cinturón, Una Ruta".

Método: para lograr los objetivos de la investigación, se utilizaron los siguientes métodos: axiomático, hipotético-deductivo y comparativo.

Resultados: los resultados del trabajo determinaron que la iniciativa One Belt, One Road de China actúa no solo como un proyecto económico, sino también como una plataforma para el intercambio cultural y social entre países. En su marco, el turismo rural se ha convertido en una herramienta para dinamizar las economías locales. La artesanía tradicional, el agroturismo y las atracciones atraen a los turistas, lo que contribuye a la creación de empleo y al aumento de los ingresos locales. El estudio concluyó que el turismo rural se está convirtiendo en un área clave de enfoque para el programa, ya que se están desarrollando instalaciones de infraestructura dirigidas al flujo turístico, lo que alienta a las regiones a ser activas en esta área. Se presta mayor atención al desarrollo sostenible del turismo rural. Esto no sólo preserva los recursos naturales, sino que también ayuda a mantener y popularizar el patrimonio cultural de las regiones. A pesar de una serie de logros, también existen desafíos como la falta de consistencia de los estándares, problemas de servicio y desarrollo insuficiente de la infraestructura en áreas remotas.

Conclusiones: con base en el análisis, se puede afirmar que el turismo rural en China seguirá creciendo, especialmente con el apoyo de las iniciativas gubernamentales.

Palabras clave: Cooperación Internacional; Promoción Sostenible; Agricultores; Residentes Locales; Patrimonio Cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is showing a trend of continuous growth and development on a global scale. It represents a unique opportunity for tourists to immerse themselves in the daily life of local people, to have unforgettable experiences and at the same time to contribute to the economic development of remote and understudied regions. Its promotion plays an important role in protecting the natural ecological environment, coordinating regional economic development, reducing urban-rural differences, and spreading and protecting local characteristic cultures. The beautiful and unspoilt natural scenery and traditional customs of rural areas create a soothing and stress-relieving environment for tourists.⁽¹⁾

China, with its centuries-old traditions, rich culture and spectacular landscapes, offers great potential for the development of rural tourism.⁽²⁾ In the context of the One Belt, One Road initiative, aimed at strengthening economic and cultural ties between Eurasian countries, rural tourism can become one of the important tools for its implementation. Given the growing interest in eco-friendly holidays, cultural exchange and immersion in traditional lifestyles, the prospects for rural tourism development look very promising.

Rural tourism in China represents an inexhaustible resource for the economic and socio-cultural development of many regions of the country. However, despite its potential, there are a number of problems and challenges that can slow down or even jeopardize its further development. Firstly, it is worth mentioning the limited investment in infrastructure, the lack of qualified tourism professionals, as well as problems with the promotion and marketing of rural tourist destinations in the international market.

In addition, the One Belt, One Road initiative implies China's active interaction with many Asian countries, which may lead to increased competition in the tourism market.⁽³⁾ In this context, it is important to understand what steps should be taken to successfully develop rural tourism so that it can compete on an equal footing with other popular destinations. Thus, the main problem facing the study is the need to identify the key factors for the successful development of rural tourism in China under the One Belt, One Road initiative and make recommendations to overcome the accumulated problems and obstacles.

There are many studies examining Asian rural tourism in its various contexts. For example, R.C. Aziz⁽⁴⁾ considers in his work various aspects of sustainable tourism development in rural areas. The author introduces an alternative paradigm of evaluation research, taking into account the tourism context and the overall development of rural communities. K. Akmoldoev⁽⁵⁾ analyses the initiative One Belt, One Road. He assesses the realism of the implementation of all its mechanisms for the countries of Central Asia.

A. Aidarova⁽⁶⁾ studies the sector of rural tourism financing. The researcher reveals the economic performance of the agricultural sector and its impact on sustainable environmental and tourism components. In turn, O. Saidmamatov et al.⁽⁷⁾ reflect in their work the factors of influence of the pandemic on the development of rural tourism. The authors reflect the perception of risk in relation to the intentions of tourists to travel in Asia. Ch. Beksultanova et al.⁽⁸⁾ study the handicraft features of rural tourism. They examine the features and prospects of this direction, taking into account the regional location. However, there is little research on trends, prospects, status, features, and key problems facing rural tourism in China in the context of the One Belt, One Road initiative.

The purpose of the study is to examine the properties and promotion trends of Chinese rural tourism in the

context of the development of the One Belt, One Road initiative. In this regard, it is possible to highlight such tasks of this work:

1) To determine the current state of rural tourism in China, taking into account the different models of its implementation within the framework of the One Belt, One Road programme. Understanding the current state of rural tourism in China is essential for mapping out the various models of implementation under the One Belt, One Road initiative. This assessment helps identify which models are most effective in promoting tourism, preserving cultural heritage, and supporting sustainable economic growth across different regions.

2) Identify the main problems and barriers to the development of rural tourism in China, taking into account regional characteristics and the implementation of the One Belt, One Road strategy. Identifying the main problems and barriers to rural tourism development in China is crucial for addressing regional disparities and challenges, such as infrastructure deficits and competition from other regions and countries. This analysis enables the formulation of targeted strategies to overcome these obstacles and enhance the positive impact of the OBOR initiative on rural tourism.

METHOD

This study employs a combination of descriptive and analytical approaches to explore the development of rural tourism in China within the context of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. The research is primarily based on secondary data and information collected from a range of academic articles, government reports, and case studies. These sources provide a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the current state, challenges, and opportunities of rural tourism in China. The study draws on official statistics and publications, including data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China. This data offers quantitative insights into the scope of rural tourism, including the number of villages and towns involved in tourism activities. Additionally, the research incorporates specific case studies of rural tourism projects and initiatives across various regions of China.

To process and analyze the information, the study employs several methodological approaches. The axiomatic method is used to establish the fundamental principles underlying rural tourism development in China. This method helps identify key factors and linkages between various components of the tourism industry and the OBOR initiative. Its elements led to the justification of the most effective strategies and activities for rural tourism development in accordance with the objectives and principles of the strategy, taking into account the corresponding difficulties in its implementation. This method made it possible to form an in-depth, systematic and substantiated understanding of the processes and prospects of China's rural tourism development. It is framed within the context of global initiatives and world trends that, in one way or another, affect the social, cultural, historical, political and economic components of the country. It allowed emphasizing the dominant factors of influence and functioning of this area, which set the rhythm and trends for the future growth of rural tourism.

The study employs a hypothetico-deductive approach to better understand the major drivers of rural tourist development in China under the OBOR project. It develops assumptions based on current research and observations, concentrating on infrastructure development, investment flows, and regional socioeconomic factors. The study compares these theories to empirical data, determining if places with considerable infrastructure expenditures see faster development in rural tourism. It also investigates how distinctive cultural and historical characteristics benefit rural tourist sites. The technique identifies elements that influence rural tourism, such as infrastructural development, government and private sector investment, and area cultural assets. The study's results are based on theory and supported by empirical facts, giving a solid foundation for the study's recommendations.

The comparative method is applied to assess regional differences and similarities in rural tourism development across China. This method allows for the evaluation of various strategies and initiatives by drawing comparisons between different regions. It identifies best practices that can be adapted to other contexts within China, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the regional dynamics influencing rural tourism. It helped to assess the effectiveness of measures and various activities undertaken in the framework of rural tourism development in China, as well as their impact. Its elements led to the identification of the most successful methodologies and approaches in the organization of rural tourism, which can be adapted or modified specifically for China. This method, through the lens of rural tourism, provided an opportunity to understand the global objectives of the One Belt, One Road initiative, as well as its role and impact on the country's economy and culture. It provided the context and perspectives for the development of rural tourism in China within the framework of the strategy, taking into account similarities and differences in research perspectives, including analyses of the positive and negative aspects of the initiative.

RESULTS

Current state and features of the development of rural tourism models in China, taking into account the regional nature

China, as one of the largest economies in the world, is actively integrating various spheres of activity into its economic system. One of such progressively developing areas is rural tourism. This segment of the tourism industry shows impressive growth and attracts the attention of both local and foreign tourists.^(9,10) In recent years, the Chinese government has been actively encouraging the development of rural tourism as one of the ways to diversify the agricultural sector and increase the income of local residents.

Ecological and sustainable tourism is becoming increasingly popular, with more and more tourists preferring green routes and holiday destinations. The government has strengthened the protection and development of the ecological environment, focusing on the harmonious symbiosis between rural tourism and the natural environment, as well as heritage, mining and rural cultural experiences.^(11,12,13,14) This kind of tourism has begun to integrate deeply with scientific and technological innovation, where the Internet, big data, artificial intelligence and other technologies are widely used. Many villages offer interactive guides, mobile apps and other digital tools to enhance travellers' experience.^(15,16) The process of rural tourism development in China causes a wide range of features that characterize its current state (table 1).

Table 1. Characteristic features of the development of rural tourism in China

Peculiarities	Characteristics
Cultural heritage	China has a rich cultural heritage, where rural areas are the custodians of traditions, crafts, and customs that immerse one in the atmosphere of an ancient state.
Natural resources	The country's rural areas offer a wealth of natural beauty, from the lush green rice terraces of Yunnan to the picturesque mountain landscapes of Sichuan Province.
Sustainable tourism	China is actively promoting the concept of sustainable tourism, which sees rural tourism as a way to conserve natural and cultural resources to actively support the local community.
Integration with agribusiness	Many farms offer agritourism programs where tourists can take part in the processes of growing and harvesting crops, as well as learn about the peculiarities of local farming.
Governmental support	The Chinese government actively supports the development of rural tourism, investing in infrastructure and promoting this area at the international level.

Consequently, rural tourism in China offers not only the opportunity to get to know the country from a new perspective, but also stimulates the development of local communities by supporting their cultural and traditional values. Thus, it is not only a journey to holiday destinations, but also an immersion into the true culture and history of the nation, helping to make China one of the leaders in rural tourism on the world stage. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, as of 2022, there are 1399 villages and 198 rural tourism towns in China.⁽¹⁷⁾ Thus, considering the regional trends, it is worth emphasizing that the development of rural tourism in Eastern China is at the leading level. The western region stands out in characteristics such as tourist reception, ecology, environmental protection, government promotion, supervision and management, cultural resources and mass culture. Northern China has high performance in terms of economy and income of the people. The central regions have a medium level of development in all of the above components. In turn, South China has a relative advantage in terms of tourism economy and residents' income in contrast to other areas.

Rural tourism in China is of particular importance in light of rapid urban growth and the need to preserve the cultural heritage of the country's numerous ethnic groups. Regional trends in rural tourism development in China are diverse, but all are aimed at meeting the needs of modern tourists and preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. Provinces such as Yunnan and Guizhou attract tourists with their scenic mountains, rice terraces and ethnic diversity. Here, rural tourism focuses on learning about the traditions of local tribes. The areas around Beijing and Shandong Province offer trips to historic villages, where it is possible to learn about the traditional culture of northern China. The provinces of Hubei and Hunan, offer mountainous landscapes and cultural sites such as ancient villages and temples. In addition, China is actively pursuing environmental initiatives in rural tourism, establishing national parks and nature reserves to protect its natural heritage. This type of tourism is gaining popularity in regions where agriculture is the main industry. Tourists can participate in agricultural activities, learn how to produce traditional products or simply enjoy fresh farm produce.^(18,19) This diversity provides them with a rich choice to travel and immerse themselves in the culture and nature of the country.

At present, depending on the different development actors, the rural tourism model in China can be categorized into the following types: farmers, government management, entrepreneurial management, and village collective management. Farmers operate spontaneously, most often on the outskirts of cities or in areas with good tourism resource base. Villagers spontaneously form tourist reception products with basic

functions such as food and accommodation. This type of rural tourism development has the characteristics of spontaneity, flexibility and equity, but faces limited capital investment, lack of stable sales channels, insufficient talent management experience and decentralized management. Equally, under the leadership of the government, rural tourism exists in a good development environment where the government has the ability to invest and develop and villagers actively co-operate with it. The authority leads the planning, investment and development, operation and management of local rural economies, and rationally reallocates urban and local resources through financial transfers, projects, infrastructure and public services. Chun'an County, Zhejiang Province, Xiajiang Village, Yu Village, Anji County are excellent examples of this type of tourism development in a short period of time.

The enterprise-led rural tourism industry in China is undergoing a transformation and development from resource-based to capitalist. Productions are leading the investment of funds to obtain the right to utilize, develop and exploit rural tourism resources. Taking full advantage of the capital advantages of organizations, modern management experience and reserve privileges of professional talents are giving new impetus to the transformation, scaling, and specialization of this industry, encouraging farmers to engage in market-oriented and capitalized rural tourism operations.⁽²⁰⁻²³⁾ However, it is important to consider that the profit-orientated nature of capital can lead to the erosion of farmers' interests and tensions between enterprises. In turn, village management uniformly regulates and manages tourism projects and organizes villagers to voluntarily participate in programmes designed and managed by the community of the locality. In addition to these models, there are also research institutes that are interested in developing this field. For example, a series of practical activities led by Professor Bao Jigang from Sun Yat-sen University and Li Xiaoyun from China Agricultural University of Yunnan Province can be highlighted.

Thus, it was determined that regional specificity plays a key role in shaping patterns of rural tourism development in China. This enables the country to offer tourists diverse and unique programmes, which makes holidays in China unforgettable and unique. Rural tourism in China is growing every year, and the management techniques used in the design and implementation of tourism development models play an important role in this success. Local communities are actively involved in the decision-making process, which allows the cultural and ethnographic characteristics of the region to be taken into account.

The managerial focus in the state's rural tourism is directed towards environmental sustainability. This ensures the preservation of natural resources and attracts ecotourists. The considered specifics of the development of this industry most often create a network of co-operation that provides high quality services. It is important to understand that each region of China has its own unique features that determine the specifics of tourism management. A competent combination of government initiatives, private investors and the active participation of local communities allows the formation of successful and sustainable models of rural tourism development.

Opportunities, problems, and prospects for the development of Chinese rural tourism within the framework of the One Belt, One Road initiative

The One Belt, One Road Initiative is a massive economic project spanning dozens of countries and connecting continents. In addition to the fact that the strategy promotes the development of international relations and economic integration, it has a number of direct and indirect consequences for the development of rural tourism in different regions of China, creating unique opportunities for the development of this industry (table 2).

Table 2. Opportunities of the One Belt, One Road strategy influencing the development of rural tourism in China

Possibilities	Characteristics
The international cooperation	The initiative involves strengthening economic and cultural ties, which becomes a catalyst for the exchange of experience and knowledge in the field of rural tourism between countries.
Attracting investments	Projects related to this strategy act as a point of attraction for investors interested in the development of infrastructure and rural tourism.
Promotion and Marketing	Joint projects with other countries within the framework of the initiative are becoming a platform for promoting Chinese rural tourism at the international level.
Education and training	Cooperation with other countries contributes to the development of educational programs for specialists in the field of rural tourism.
Sustainable development	Cooperation with international partners allows China to implement sustainable development concepts in the field of rural tourism, taking into account environmental and social aspects.

Thus, the One Belt, One Road Initiative provides China with unique opportunities to develop rural tourism, turning remote regions of the country into attractive tourist destinations and promoting economic growth and

cultural exchange. Under its auspices, the construction of asphalt roads, railways and other infrastructure can be carried out, which makes remote rural areas more accessible to tourists. Funds allocated under this initiative can be used to develop tourism infrastructure such as guest houses, tourist centres and other facilities.⁽²⁴⁾ This industry has acquired particular importance taking into account the One Belt, One Road strategy, which is aimed at intensive economic and cultural cooperation of the country with other states. However, despite the impressive prospects, there are a number of problems that rural tourism faces under this program (table 3).

Table 3. Challenges faced by Chinese rural tourism under the One Belt, One Road initiative

Problems	Characteristics
Infrastructure problems	Many rural areas in China face a lack of quality transport, communications and hotel infrastructure, making them less attractive to foreign tourists.
Environmental issues	Tourism development leads to environmental degradation in rural areas, especially in the absence of adequate waste management and construction controls.
Risk of loss of cultural heritage	With the attraction of large numbers of tourists, the likelihood of losing the unique cultural traditions and customs of local communities increases.
Lack of qualified personnel	In many rural tourism regions, there is a shortage of specialists capable of working in accordance with international standards.
Competition with other countries	As part of the strategy, many countries have stepped up their tourism programs, creating additional competition for China.
Limited funding	Despite the strategic importance of the project, many rural tourism programs face a lack of investment and financial support.

Therefore, it must be emphasized that the One Belt, One Road strategy opens up new horizons for rural tourism in China. However, to successfully realize the potential in this area, it is necessary to solve the above-mentioned problems, ensuring balanced and sustainable development of rural areas. The link between rural tourism and strategy is reflected in strengthening cooperation with countries and regions along specific routes, upgrading infrastructure and economic development that can improve transport and communication infrastructure, and promoting various tourism destinations through effective marketing. In addition, local governments and tour operators do not always understand market demand and tourist interest, leading to the launch of identical products that are similar or duplicate. Lack of awareness about product image and brand building has also led to the homogenization of rural tourism products, such as the antique commercial districts that are being built in many regions.^(25,26) The product format layout is copied and exported, which in turn influences market communication and tourism promotion in general.

Although the Chinese government has stepped up efforts to train and manage rural tourism services, and increased investment in infrastructure construction, due to the relatively backward economic development of many areas, the workforce is still more likely to be older people, and the overall level of service needs to be further improved. On the other hand, due to the lack of a professional operation team, the marketing, and promotion of rural tourism destinations is not productive enough, while limiting tourists' access to information about rural tourism products. Rural tourism needs to attract capital to develop appropriate resources, since many destinations do not have systematic long-term planning. In light of the above issues, it is imperative that the One Belt, One Road Initiative implements the principles of sustainable tourism.^(27,28,29,30) This will help preserve ecosystems, cultural heritage and improve the quality of life of local residents. Sustainable resource planning and management, as well as active involvement of local communities in tourism development, can help minimize negative impacts and ensure the long-term development of rural tourism in China.

Among other things, like any large-scale project, the One Belt, One Road initiative also poses certain environmental challenges, especially when it comes to the development of rural tourism in China. An increase in the flow of tourists leads to the deterioration of natural resources, especially in environmentally sensitive areas.^(31,32) Infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads, hotels, and other facilities cause pollution of water sources and soil, and the increase in the number of tourists leads to problems with waste disposal and rubbish management.^(33,34,35) Mass tourism can threaten rare species of plants and animals, leading to the destruction of their natural habitats, and also cause socio-cultural changes when the traditional way of life of local residents collides with the needs and interests of tourists. Therefore, the government must strengthen management and restrictions in attracting investment and project development. Investor screening, risk control and planned management should be relaxed to avoid indiscriminate and destructive development of tourism resources, paying attention to environmental protection and sustainable use of resources.

Thus, the analysis of the results emphasizes that, taking into account all the advantages and disadvantages of the One Belt, One Road strategy, in the future, rural tourism can become a stimulus for the development of regional economies, providing jobs, as well as supporting local production and products of the country. By focusing on environmentally sustainable practices, China can become an example for other countries in developing eco-

friendly and sustainable tourism. The initiative is expected to invest heavily in transport infrastructure, which will improve access to remote rural areas and encourage tourism development. In addition, cooperation with neighbouring countries can facilitate the creation of joint itineraries, giving tourists the opportunity to explore several countries in one trip. In conclusion, the One Belt, One Road program will serve as a powerful catalyst for the development of rural tourism in China, provided proper planning and implementation of sustainable practices are implemented. Given the enormous potential of the country's cultural and natural heritage, the prospects for rural tourism in China are very promising.

DISCUSSION

The rural tourism market is of great importance in today's world, as it can generate wealth and employment in rural areas and regions with pronounced economic and financial problems. Against this background, the emergence of this industry is a natural reaction of those sections of society who wish to avoid the alienation of globalization and intensification. The economic advantages of rural tourism, as well as the need for community involvement, mediation between entrepreneurs, residents of the region and government, and the implementation of programmes and strategies to protect natural resources, cultural sites and cities, form the basis for the proper development of such a tourism area.

According to S. Zare⁽³⁶⁾, one of the main contradictions that rural tourism represents is due to the fact that its initiatives and strategies take into account most often economic parameters without taking into account the characteristics of less advantaged communities and natural and cultural heritage. The debate between the preservation or transformation of nature in the name of development or progress, the benefits and harms of tourism, emphasizes the importance of planning strategies appropriate to each regional context. Moreover, when rural tourism is framed within a 'colonial discourse', the businessman is privileged and his ability to apply other schemes more appropriate to the regional reality is limited. The researcher's considered opinion echoes the results obtained, emphasizing that an integral mechanism for the development of rural tourism is the correct choice of management model, which will take into account not only the economic components of the state policy, but also the regional peculiarities of a particular locality.

J.G. Brida *et al.*⁽³⁷⁾ believe that the discourse regarding rural tourism, created around centres with capitalist power, limits the correct application of strategies that favour communities. In this regard, tourism management resembles the processes established in the time of the colony, but with new forms of financial obstacles. Populations are integrated into non-agricultural work due to the fact that the jobs offered by urbanization generate higher incomes than those created by agricultural work. The supply of non-agricultural labour and the cost of land accelerate the loss of cultural and craft heritage. This is important because each region has a limit on visitor reception capacity, depending on landscape, social and cultural characteristics. The results of this study also emphasize that the development of strategic rural tourism initiatives must take into account the interests of all parties, presenting, first and foremost, the preservation of national assets and attractions.

From the perspective of G. Sen and L. Bingqin,⁽³⁸⁾ rural tourism should be conceptualized using modern approaches, necessarily adapted to local realities. The tourism sector is only a fragile basis to sustain the development of an area or region, especially if it is rural, but it can be improved through related activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, or industry. Regional development strategies that consider tourism as an alternative to economic promotion reduce the state of extreme poverty. Land use plays a key role in rural tourism development as it is the basis for planning, organizing and implementing tourism activities in rural areas. These may be areas with unique natural monuments, historical and cultural attractions or specific agro-cultural features.

The identification of zones for tourism development allows concentrating investments in the creation of infrastructure: roads, housing, recreational areas and other facilities necessary for comfortable stay of tourists. Land use in the context of rural tourism can stimulate the development of agro-production, handicrafts and other industries, contributing to job creation and increasing the income of the local population. Its regulation is often the basis for resolving possible conflicts between tourists, local communities and businesses.⁽³⁹⁻⁴¹⁾ When analysing the data, it is observed that the proper organization of regional and national strategies for rural tourism development, including land use, somehow improves business and tourism development in the region.

The position of W. An and S. Alarcon⁽⁴²⁾ emphasizes that tourism involves changing the functions of rural space in such a way that the production of goods is reduced compared to the production of services. It opens up opportunities for local people to engage in entrepreneurship, work in hotels, restaurants, tour bureaus or as guides. This helps to reduce unemployment in the region. Local people can earn income not only from direct tourist services, but also from selling agricultural products, handicrafts, national food. Increased interest in the region can attract investment for the creation and development of infrastructure, which in turn contributes to the progress of the entire welfare of the village population.

With the emergence of tourists, underdeveloped regions begin to actively develop transport, communal and social infrastructure, including within the framework of international strategies. Thus, rural tourism contributes

to the growth of other industries, from construction to retail, improving the economic performance of the state as a whole. Successful projects in this area can become an example for external investors who see the potential for investment in a particular area. The regional economy can benefit from the sale of goods and services related to national culture and traditions, which is based on the principles of sustainability, ensuring long-term and beneficial relationships, minimizing negative impacts on nature and the socio-cultural environment.⁽⁴³⁾ The researchers' rationales echo the results of this paper, emphasizing the importance of developing this type of tourism in order to effectively implement strategies and initiatives to promote the economy in rural areas.

Researcher G. Richards⁽⁴⁴⁾ emphasizes that in the era of globalization and intensive development of urban agglomerations, interest in rural areas and their potential is growing every year. Rural tourism in this context stands as a fundamental basis, representing a strategic resource and an important tool for regional development. Considered not only as a way to attract tourist flows and economic benefits, this type of tourism acts as a catalyst for socio-cultural and environmental initiatives. Within the framework of international economic strategies that emphasize sustainable development, preservation of cultural heritage and environmental responsibility, the development of rural tourism is of particular importance. This vector of development stimulates deep interaction between countries, facilitates the exchange of experiences, attracts investment and creates new jobs at the local level.

Regional rural tourism markets are extremely diverse. Some places emphasize ecotourism and conservation of natural resources, others focus on cultural and historical traditions, while others focus on agro-tourism with the opportunity to learn about local food production. Many farmers and landowners find in tourism an additional source of income. The researcher's findings coincide with the conclusions obtained in this paper, emphasizing the active interest in rural tourism development given the current social, economic and political challenges.

Thus, having analysed various aspects of the development of this industry within the framework of initiatives and strategies, taking into account regional needs, it was found that rural tourism, long considered as a secondary direction, is now becoming a key element in the strategies of states. The reasons for this interest are multifaceted: the search for unique experiences, the desire to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city, and the desire for sustainable recreation. All these factors have led to the fact that rural tourism has become an integral part of international economic initiatives. The main driver for integrating rural tourism into international initiatives is economic benefit. Rural areas often face the problems of depopulation, lack of investment and jobs. Tourism becomes a response to these challenges by attracting investment, creating jobs and stimulating local production.

CONCLUSIONS

International economic initiatives like China's One Belt, One Road are increasingly integrating rural tourism as a tool for sustainable development. The tourism industry not only helps rural regions thrive economically, but it also plays an important role in conserving local cultures and encouraging sustainable practices. The evaluation of various models indicated that government-led efforts, private sector engagement, and community-based approaches each have distinct strengths and weaknesses, with some places experiencing substantial success while others experience underdevelopment and a lack of resources.

The study reveals several obstacles to China's rural tourism growth, especially in the context of the OBOR initiative. These include limited infrastructure, a shortage of competent tourist experts, and difficulties with international marketing. Competitive pressures, as well as concerns about cultural preservation and environmental sustainability, present additional challenges. Despite these difficulties, rural tourism has the ability to significantly contribute to China's economic and social objectives if focused policies are adopted. It can take many different forms depending on the setting, but when combined with contemporary economic strategies it provides chances for regional economic and social growth, cultural preservation, and urban-rural links.

The One Belt, One Road strategy necessitates the creation of robust programs to boost rural tourism, involving collaboration with local authorities, residents, and experts. It necessitates the establishment of specific criteria and action modalities for different segments, and a comprehensive understanding of rural tourism typologies. The study has achieved its aim, but further research is needed to improve the industry, considering China's regional characteristics and the economic, cultural, political, historical, and social links between rural tourism and the One Belt, One Road program.

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