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Rural Tourism Business as an Economic Instrument for the Development of Economically Backward Regions

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Abstract

The disease COVID-19 caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2 has initially disrupted the Chinese economy after the first cases were reported in December 2019 in Wuhan city in Hubei province of China. The virus continued to spread throughout the rest of the world. This spread of the virus led to the official designation of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in late February 2020, which resulted in the disruption of these economies due to the stringent lockdowns and restrictions in travel disease's evolution. The disruptive economic impact is highly uncertain, making it difficult for policymakers to craft an appropriate policy response to these macroeconomic disruptions. To better understand possible economic outcomes, this paper explores the use of the machine learning approach LSTM to assess the economic forecast in some selected countries. The empirical results from this paper demonstrate that there are temporary disruptions in macroeconomics in the short run and these economies rebound. The recovery of each selected country may be different as the forecast would imply.

Keywords: Importance of rural tourism development, Rural areas, Social and economic problems of the village

Introduction

The development of tourism business in rural areas is a unique opportunity to advance economically backward regions. This can be achieved by harnessing the natural, cultural, and historical resources into tourism products. More so, the national, traditional, and historical identity will be preserved. Majorly, the population living in rural areas traditionally preserves national traditions. Therefore, the employment of local people in rural areas is a prerequisite for the survival of ethnocultural features (Hall, Kirkpatrick, & Mitchell, 2005).

This article discusses the economic and social problems of the rural region of Adjara and ways to solve them through the development of rural tourism. The mentioned method has been successfully used in many European countries for the past 50 years. Sharing the European model and experience of rural tourism business development was an essential issue of the article. Since this article focuses on an international experience that develops the rural tourism business, the Scandinavian countries stand out. An example of this is Norway, where rural tourism plays a decisive role in the economic and social well-being of the village, as well as in the preservation of cultural, ethnographic, and historical values.

The material used in the paper represents the research. Quantitative research was used as the method of the study, and questionnaires were administered through random sampling. The study was conducted in one of the regions of Adjara, which covered 70% of rural homesteads. As a result of analyzing and synchronizing data, diagrams and data counting scales were created

Literature Review

Rural tourism is one of the many ways to solve economic and social problems in rural areas. It is regarded as an economic tool that advances backward and less developed regions in many countries. Sharing the Norwegian experience to develop tourism in rural areas is especially important. This is because Norway and Georgia are traditionally farming states. More so, the village not only has a traditional meaning but is the basis for preserving the cultural and historical features of the country as a whole.

Since 1980, globalization has damaged the economies of rural regions in many countries of the world, causing many agricultural households to go bankrupt. As a result, the migration of the rural population to the city has increased. The leading cause of these destructive processes was a significant decrease in demand for goods and services produced in rural areas. In this regard, the Ministry of Agriculture in Norway adopted a government program that supported private homesteads and formed a tourism business with the resources available on their base. Government support programs for

developing tourism business in rural areas have contributed to the creation of many exotic hotels in Norwegian villages, which are very popular among the Norwegian population and foreigners. Also, creating exotic and unique hotels contributed to developing agriculture, road infrastructure, transport, and other related areas in Norway. Tourism in rural areas, in general, became the main prerequisite for the social and economic development of the region (Edda Espeland, 2016)

Therefore, having the Norwegian experience of rural tourism business development is very important for Adjara. An interesting book by John Egeland and Solberg presents authentic rural tourism products that are based on the Middle Ages. According to the book, buildings, courtyards, interiors, and exteriors at tourism sites have been preserved as much as possible in their original form or have been restored following the medieval style. Sharing the Norwegian experience in the selection, development, and financing of the appropriate homesteads for developing rural tourism business is a unique method of rural tourism formation, which is very important to consider in Adjara. The creation of tourism in rural areas based on such homesteads ensures the sustainable development of tourism in the rural region (John Egeland & Solberg, 2007). Many European authors also address the great importance of tourism development in rural areas in their works, and this will be shared in this article as well.

Wanda Georgia and her co-authors address the role of tourism in rural areas in their work. The book discusses the role of rural tourism in the conditions of globalization, the part of cultural changes in rural communities, theoretical issues that define rural settlement and rural landscape, and methodological issues for developing rural tourism. Practical examples of tourism formation in rural areas of Canada such as Ontario and Alberta are given and analyzed in the book. The paper highlights topics such as the relationship between sustainable rural tourism and the well-being of the rural population. The authors pay great attention to the importance of using new approaches for the development of tourism in rural areas (Wanda George, Heather Mair, & Donald Reid, 2009)

The work of Marie Cavley and her colleagues is another interesting material that deals with the development of rural tourism business in Ireland under the conditions of globalization, where 57 rural farms and 23 related organizations are involved in the rural tourism business. The article talks about the importance of uniting the mentioned organizations to achieve success in the international market, the formation of niche rural tourism products, and the importance of implementing unified marketing (Cavley, Gaffey, & Gilmour, 2002).

The prerequisites for the formation of tourism business in rural areas are different in various countries. However, the appearance of tourism

business in rural areas is attractive in North America, Canada, and Spain. The social and economic foundations of the formation of tourism business in rural areas in these countries are well described in the guidebook "Rural Tourism and Sustainable Business" by Derek Hall and his colleagues. Sharing the experience of the mentioned countries is especially important to determine the economic role of the tourism business in the rural regions of Georgia (Hall, Kirkpatrick, & Mitchell, 2005)

Furthermore, sharing the Spanish experience of rural tourism business formation is also very important since Spain, like Norway, successfully occupies a niche role in the market of rustic tourism products. The paper talks about the importance of creating the appropriate state regulation in Spain and the activity of local farms in rural areas in the past year, which actively contributed to the development of tourism in rural areas in Spain (Barke, 1994)

Agrotourism is one of the directions of tourism in rural areas. For diversity and sustainable development of rural tourism business, it is necessary to share the international experience of agrotourism development. Temirbulatova and Borza (2015) identify the importance of agrotourism development in their article. The article discusses in detail the strategic model of rural agrotourism development as a prerequisite for creating a sustainable and green economy.

There are several ways to develop rural regions, one of which is tourism. Lenkovics, Kalmar-Rimoczi, and Beltane discuss the level of tourism development in their paper, using one of the rural regions of Hungary as an example. They also summarize the 10-year development plan in the background of 10-year integration with the European Union. The information used in the mentioned article was significant for Georgia, as a country moving towards European integration.

Tourism business development in rural areas should begin by researching tourist markets. Fred Selnes's book provides a market research methodology. The material is an in-depth work on studying needs and conducting research. The mentioned research methods were used during the research and analysis. It is necessary to consider the mentioned methodology and recommendations while researching tourist markets in the rural areas of Adjara (Selnes, 1993).

While working on the article, two important issues were studied: the issues of business, marketing, and innovations in the formation of tourism in rural areas and the issues of education and training of the rural population, which is a prerequisite for the formation of sustainable and intensive tourism business in rural areas. Rural tourism is an exciting and innovative opportunity to develop rural regions and give them a new historical meaning. The selected literature was chosen because it emphasizes the role of rural tourism in socio-economic development. The presented literature also identifies the

international practice for sustainable and intensive tourism development in rural areas.

Existing Norwegian works represent the main part of the literature, which was selected in the direction of tourism in rural areas. This is explained by the similarity between Georgia and Norway in terms of farming traditions and socio-economic problems in rural areas caused by globalization. Therefore, sharing the Norwegian experience by creating a tourism business model in rural areas and establishing appropriate state regulation is the foundation of this work.

Methods

To study the social and economic problems of the villages in Adjara, Georgia, the quantitative research and analysis method was chosen. As a result, questionnaire was developed that included all important issues and the answers given were compared and analyzed. Research was conducted in the municipality of Keda, Adjara and a total of 158 homesteads were surveyed through random sampling. During the survey, all the homesteads were physically examined and the residents of the mentioned homesteads were also spoken to. The study was relatively large-scale and it covered all homesteads characteristic of the region. Thus, infallible and in-depth material were collected and the causes of social and economic problems in rural areas were investigated. The natural and cultural resources in the region, which are necessary for the sustainable development of tourism business in rural areas, were identified as well. The research included the questionnaires needed to study rural areas' resources and socio-economic conditions. In this article, only a part of the conducted research is presented, which illustrates an idea of the economic problems in rural areas.

The data obtained from the conducted research were calculated and distributed in pre-prepared tables. As a result of the received data, an analysis and a qualitative assessment of the research was made. Interestingly, the conducted research covered many more issues. Depending on the format of the article, only a certain part of the research is presented in the paper.

International Experience of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism as an economic tool is used in solving rural problems, since the end of the last century in Norway and Spain. This is why the experience of the mentioned countries in solving rural issues was studied, and sharing it is critically essential for the Adjara region of Georgia. Norway is rich in open landscapes, untouched forests, fjords, and lakes. It is also attractive for its unique building style and architecture. The traditional activity of the Norwegian people was farming life. Nowadays, tourist facilities are created based on these farms and homesteads, which are on the national

monument protection list of the country. It is also an expression of the authentic and unique Norwegian culture.

Since the eighties of the last century, global processes have harmed the development of agriculture in Norway. Therefore, sharing the Norwegian experience of rural tourism business formation is very important because the Norwegian model of rural tourism development is the most acceptable for Georgian, private Adjara villages. To solve the mentioned problem, the Ministry of Agriculture of Norway developed a rural promotion program, with the aim to receive additional income for the population by receiving tourists based on the resources available on private homesteads in rural areas. However, due to the inefficiency of the mentioned program, the farmers refused to participate. One part of the farmers created the Norwegian Entrepreneurs' Union (NHO), and the other part was the association of owners of tourism businesses on private homesteads - an organization called "HANEN." The primary function of the mentioned organization became the general marketing of the tourist facilities that are members of it. However, even this organization could not get the effect the farmers wanted because they did not have the appropriate knowledge and qualifications. Later on, the organization, Innovasjon Norge (former Export Council of Norway), helped the said association. They created a unique program that took into account financial and professional assistance for farmers. With the help of the mentioned organization, outstanding, exciting farmsteads in rural areas were selected, which were transformed into tourist facilities in the financing program set by specialists. Based on the work plan and criteria, preference was given to a particular homestead (Preference was given to the history of the homestead, its age, the traditional architecture of the buildings on the homestead, the level of education of the population living in it, their knowledge of traditional handicrafts, etc.). Through Innovasjon Norge, courses were created to train and improve the skills of farmers, and the population living on the homestead was trained. It should be noted that as a result of the effective work of the mentioned organization, Norway has earned a name as a country of exclusive rural tourism, where the service standards and quality are very high.

The organization "HANEN" is still successfully functioning. Its functions have increased nowadays, and it includes the creation of uniform policies and standardization, improvement of reservation and service systems, and positioning in target markets. Since thousands of homesteads, tourist facilities, and families are already involved in the mentioned organization, the costs of implementing the mentioned activities provide a way to save money for each participant. In addition, homesteads and tourist facilities included in the organization are connected by several thematic routes, which provide equal economic opportunity for everyone.

The active development of the rural tourism business in Spain dates back to the 1980s. It is worth noting that Spain is one of the first countries in Europe to use the rural tourism business as an economic tool for developing peripheral regions. Spain was traditionally associated with seaside resorts. The developed part of the country was the maritime regions, which is why the rural areas were almost empty. Since the end of the 20th century, when there was an active discussion about the need to avoid a polluted environment, the Spanish government decided to promote the development of tourism businesses in rural areas.

For the first time, tourism as an economic phenomenon appeared in the rural regions of Spain in 1967, a program called "Vacaciones en casas de labranza" (Vacations in Farmhouses). Rural farmers were allowed to turn their homesteads into tourist attractions. In the first year of the program, the number of sleeping places needed to receive tourists in Spanish villages increased significantly. As a result of the implemented works, the number of travelers interested in rural tourism increased, which laid the foundation for more serious projects in Spain.

The Spanish government created a unique financing program and regulations for the development of tourism in rural areas, which was implemented for the first time in the Catalonia region. This was followed by the neighboring province of Aragon. The story of rural tourism business in the mentioned regions was exciting and attractive for other areas of Spain. All over Spain, the development of the rural tourism business began. As a result, the center of tourism moved from the sea resorts to the heart of Spain and significantly solved the socio-economic problems of the population living here.

The formation of the state regulation and model of rural tourism in Georgia is necessary to resolve economic problems in rural areas rapidly. This paper provides details of the development of rural tourism business in Norway and Spain, since these two countries have state regulations and models for rural tourism business. Rural tourism is developing in many countries, but the model of state regulation is only available in these two countries. Forming the business model of tourism in rural areas leads to the possibility of strategic approaches and consistent business development planning. Sharing the mentioned experience and bringing the Norwegian and Spanish model of state regulation to Georgia will contribute to the active development of the rural tourism business in Georgia.

Results and Discussion

If the above-mentioned international experience is considered, the economic and social problems of the villages of Adjara can be solved. Therefore, special organizations should be created at the state level, which will

take care of rural development through the formation of tourism business. Adjara is exceptionally rich in natural, cultural, and historical resources. Historical monuments dating back to the first century are located in the region. Adjara region is distinguished by its religious features, lifestyle, and unique cultural heritage. If the Georgian government begins to develop rural tourism in the Adjara region by sharing international experience, it will be possible to create the area and preserve the traditional, unique cultural life of the Adjara villages. This, in turn, will attract travelers from many parts of the world.

Rural tourism has long existed in developed European countries as an economic tool for rural development. During the strategic planning of tourism, many developed countries play a significant role in developing tourism in rural areas. Therefore, the sustainable and intensive development of tourism business in rural regions of European countries is based on scientific research. Also, the state regulations and recommendations that are formed for the proper development of tourism business in rural areas are based on scientific work.

In the modern world, globalization significantly impacts economic and social life.

Globalization and its Consequences in the Adjara Region

Globalization is the integration and unification of cultural, economic, and social processes in the modern world. Globalization processes during the development of specific business activities have both positive and negative aspects, which are vitally important to consider during the planning and organization of sustainable development of tourism business in rural areas. The integration processes, which the rapid growth of globalization has caused, face new challenges every day. Even in the world's leading countries, it is difficult to maintain national, traditional production and strengthen the national currency every day. In the conditions of globalization, it becomes more and more challenging to preserve national and cultural characteristics and identity. Nonetheless, globalization is an irreversible process. This is why it is important to maintain economic stability and sustainability in a changing environment.

As a result of integration and unification, Georgia faced new international requirements, which are difficult for developing countries to meet. In this regard, the government will have to meet the standards and requirements set at the international level, which in itself complicates business development processes and, at the same time, increases the cost of a specific product. Despite many negative factors, globalization is a new opportunity to produce unique and niche products that can compete with other similar products in the international market.

During the Soviet Union, the Adjara region was the leading supplier of citrus and tea to other republics of the Union. Therefore, the Adjara region

held a niche position during the sales of the mentioned products. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, citrus and tea appeared in these markets from other countries at a lower price. As a result, Adjara lost its niche position in the needs of its products. Georgian products could not compete with goods imported from other countries. Thus, citrus and tea production decreased in Adjara. At the initial stage, it was difficult for the rural population of Adjara to find new markets due to the political and challenging economic situation at that time.

Georgia was traditionally the homeland of agriculture. Agriculture and working on the land were not only a source of economic income for the Georgian people, it was an expression of history, culture, and tradition. Working with the land was related to ensuring the well-being of the vineyard and maintaining its identity. Georgian people's love for the land is expressed in the diversity and culture of agricultural activities. As a result of globalization, the country faced the danger of forgetting the said tradition. The main goal of the formation of any economic activity is to create jobs and ensure the well-being of the population. The presence of jobs leads to a stable economic and social environment. In recent decades, the issue of employment in rural areas has been one of the main problems. The level of work in the rural areas is low, and the wages for the existing jobs are also meager. Therefore, the villages are almost empty of young people, which hurts the preservation of traditions, culture, and the history there.

The main goal of sustainable development of tourism business in rural areas is to return the population to the village. Consequently, it is necessary to carry out essential measures in tourism development and create new jobs. For the sustainable and intensive development of tourism business in rural areas, it is also essential to involve the local population to restore cultural and historical features which are exciting and attractive for tourists.

As a result of disruption of traditional agriculture, unemployment, migration of newcomers, and the general decline of interest in the countryside, the traditional cultural characteristics in the villages of Adjara were forgotten. It is also worthy to mention that the authentic style of residential and commercial buildings, which is typical of Adjara and necessary for developing tourism business in rural areas is distorted by modern constructions. This dwindles the interest to grow tourism business in rural areas.

Nevertheless, the development of tourism in rural areas improves the social and economic situation of people living in rural areas.

The rural tourism can have many positive aspects, including:

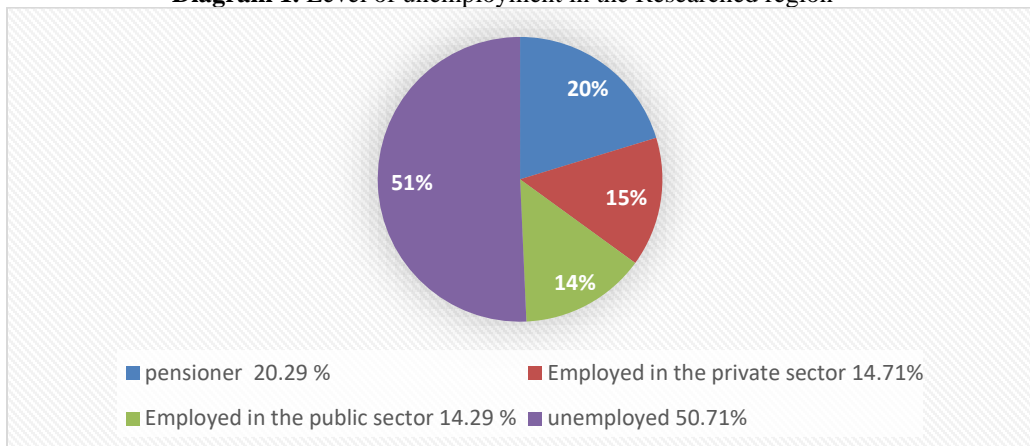
- Creation of new jobs for the local population in rural areas and obtaining additional income for the local population
- Formation of the tradition and culture of recreation in the countryside among the population living in the city, with the development of

comfortable and high-quality tourism products and services in the rural areas

- An opportunity for foreign tourists to get to know the culture, history, and customs of the highlands of Adjara
- Facilitation of road construction and general travel improvement of infrastructure in rural regions
- Promotion of civil infrastructure development
- Facilitating the formation of service facilities in rural regions and on the roads leading to the village
- Facilitating the arrangement of recreational and spectacular places from the city to the private homestead

The stoppage of local production in the Adjara region led to the migration of the rural population to the city and abroad in search of jobs. The villages became empty, and the people forgot the traditional, economic, and cultural life. The diagram below (Diagram 1) shows the level of unemployment in the region investigated, which clearly expresses the socio-economic situation that exists in this community.

Diagram 1. Level of unemployment in the Researched region

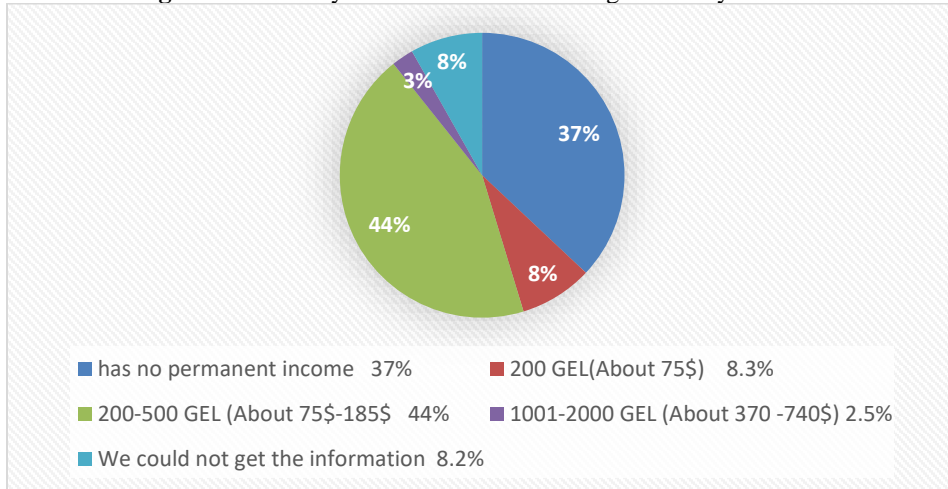


From the above, it can be concluded that there is a problem with employment in rural areas, which leads to the economic and social issues that exist in rural areas today. As a result of the research conducted in rural regions of Adjara, Georgia, it appeared that half of the population living in rural areas are unemployed (50.71% and 20.29% are pensioners). Many people are in search of new working conditions to meet their daily, necessary physical needs. The youth among the rural population are few as most of them have gone to study and work in the city. According to the information received from the respondents, they no longer return to the villages to permanently live there,

which makes Georgian villages lose the tradition of people living in the rural areas.

Diagram 2 below shows the monthly incomes of the households that were surveyed. Obtaining income information was necessary to prove to the population the necessity and expediency of getting possible additional revenues through developing tourism business in rural areas.

Diagram 2. Monthly income of families living on surveyed homesteads



This research aimed to first identify the difficult economic situation in the villages of Adjara, Georgia, and simultaneously study the international experience in solving similar challenges in rural areas. Based on the result of the research, 30.5% (which is the majority of the population) have meager incomes, 8.3% are below the minimum threshold, and 37% of the surveyed population do not have a regular monthly revenue because their incomes depend on the sale of small amounts of crops, which are seasonal. Only 2.5% of the surveyed population has a stable average income, and many of the mentioned population work in the city. The socio-economic situation of the people living on the surveyed homesteads is severe, and this is evidenced by the information on their monthly incomes.

The above-presented diagrams show the economic problems in the villages of Adjara. A large part of the population living in rural areas are unemployed, and a large part of the youth population have moved to the city. Although some of the population still lives in rural areas, they do not have stable economic income. This has caused a lot of social problems such as:

- Poverty and unemployment of rural population: Emptying of villages.
- Migration of youth from villages to the cities or abroad.
- Forgetting traditional agricultural life.
- Destruction of cultural and historical past.

Recommendations that will contribute to the development of tourism business in rural areas of Adjara include the following:

- The formation of a state institution will work in the direction of sustainable and intensive development of tourism business in rural areas.
- Acquaintance with international experience and formation of rural tourism business model.
- Development and implementation of appropriate state regulations for the active development of tourism in rural areas.
- Organization of marketing research and systematic processing of received data.
- Development of methodology and principles of selection of private homesteads to be financed.
- Regulation of tourism, transport, and security infrastructure.

Conclusion

Globalization and related processes implemented in Adjara for the past 30 years have negatively impacted the region's socio-economic life. As a result of the negative impact, the rural population in the Adjara region has significantly decreased. Thus, the traditional, agricultural, and cultural life in rural areas has been forgotten.

The development of tourism in the rural areas of Georgia is especially important for mountainous Adjara. This is because the proximity of the seaside resorts in the region to the mountainous areas makes it possible to attract not only local tourists, but also foreign tourists to the rural areas.

Promoting rural tourism business development in Adjara will contribute to solving the social and economic problems. The intensive and sustainable development of tourism in rural areas will allow rural residents to earn income on their homesteads. It will improve not only the homesteads that accommodate but also the families who specialize in transportation, food products, and other services offered in rural areas.

The prerequisite for sustainable development of rural tourism business is the formation of niche and exclusive tourism products in rural areas. The village preserves the country's history, culture, traditions, and peculiarities. During the appearance of tourism products in rural areas, all the unique features and habits that make the village unique should be taken into account. It is impossible to attract local and foreign tourists to the countryside or keep them for a long time if there are no unique products that cannot be seen and bought anywhere else. The experiences of the above-mentioned rural tourism product formation can be shared from the Norwegian and Spanish approaches.

The development of rural tourism businesses based on private homesteads is a unique and modern economic opportunity for the development of backward rural regions, reduction of migration, and preservation of cultural-historical features. The difficult economic and social situation in the villages of Adjara can be solved if the relevant state bodies pay attention to developing rural tourism in the region. For the intensive and sustainable development of tourism in rural areas, legislative changes and the creation of unique normative acts are necessary. This will contribute to the rapid and intensive development of tourism in rural areas. For sustainable tourism development in rural areas, it is essential to create an appropriate organization by the state. Hence, sharing international experience will create a business plan that can be adapted and developed by the Adjara region (Hall, Kirkpatrick, & Mitchell, 2005)

Proper formation of tourism in rural areas will contribute to the formation of a healthy population. The development of tourism business in rural areas also contributes to the recovery and recreation of the local people, thus promoting rural tourism among the urban population and forming appropriate tourism products in rural areas. This research was carried out from May to June 2022. Questionnaire was used as a research method. Thereafter, it was compiled in advance and included all the necessary provisions. Through the provided answers, it was possible to identify the problems in rural areas. The root cause of such problems was determined as well. The research was carried out through a random selection of homesteads in one of the regions of Adjara, which is the most characteristic and rich in historical and cultural resources.

The purpose of carrying out any economic activity is to create jobs. If tourism in rural areas developed according to the international experience, it will allow the population living in rural areas and the youth who emigrated to the city to find employment in their homes. Through this research, the causes of socio-economic problems in the Adjara region were outlined. The tourism business was identified as an economic tool that procures ways to solve these problems.

The work aimed to show a modern way of solving economic and social problems in rural areas by sharing international experiences. Subsequently, rural tourism will contribute to revitalizing the villages of Adjara, which will provide new opportunities for rural development in the rural population.

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