



RESEARCH NOTES AND REPORTS

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• Research Notes

Democratizing the Tourist Dollar in Costa Rica

Nancy W. Shumaker

Georgia Southern University, USA

The rapid rise in volume of tourists visiting Costa Rica, many of them students or middle-class tourists, has stimulated demand for private homestay opportunities. Historically, much of this housing has been accessed through language institutes that have retained a hefty portion of the housing fee paid to the women providing the housing. In 1991, the efforts by a small group of such women to organize coincided with governmental efforts to facilitate small-business ownership as a means of fostering long-term economic development. The result was formation of the TUR-CASA association in 1992 (Rivas Ríos and Arcc Arias 1993).

TUR-CASA, an acronym for the Spanish expression *turismo casero* ("home tourism"), is an association of middle-class housewives, many of whom are single heads of household. As of 1993, 150 affiliates in the urban zone (San José) and 75 in the rural zones offered 400 rooms for homestays throughout the country. The Central Executive Association of Economic and Public Health Projects (ACEPESA) provides TUR-CASA an office at its headquarters managed by a full-time, bilingual secretary with access to a computer, fax, telephone, and telex (González and Calvo 1993).

The founders of TUR-CASA decided not to include men in the association since men are rarely directly involved in the activities required for the housing of guests; additionally, many women might be inhibited from joining and participating in the association if men were present. At first, the primary objective of TUR-CASA was the generation of greater revenue for the women by removing the middle-man, the language institutes, from the housing process. However, as the organization developed, long-term goals were amplified

to include diversification and improvement in the quality of services offered, establishment of prices reflective of the differences in services offered from household to household, increasing the number of accommodations offered and identifying new markets for the services offered.

Financing was one of the first problems to be handled. At present, banks in Costa Rica do not have special lines of credit for financing small tourism business ventures. The Popular Bank of Communal Development agreed to finance 10 loans submitted by members of TUR-CASA for remodeling projects to enlarge homes and purchase electrical home appliances. TUR-CASA, for its part, agreed to screen and train the applicants so as to ensure repayment of the loans (Rojas Santamaría 1992).

Another major problem was publicity, a necessity if TUR-CASA were going to attract the numbers of tourists needed to support the association's members. TUR-CASA helped to organize a series of workshops across the country, which culminated in the First National Meeting of Small Tourism Entrepreneurs in August 1992. The delegates voted to "redouble efforts to promote the strengthening of micro and small tourism businesses through the development of small business organizations with the capacity to assume the commercialization, financing, facilitation, protection of the environment and preservation of Costa Rica's cultural identity" (Rivas Río and Arce Arias 1993). Later, the National Chamber of Small Tourism Entrepreneurs (CANAMET) was established. By January 1993, it contained 18 small tourism organizations, including TUR-CASA, representing over 1,000 small tourism entrepreneurs (Rivas Río and Arce Arias 1993).

Subsequently, CANAMET and TUR-CASA worked together to establish JADE TUR, a travel agency to be owned by affiliates of CANAMET through the purchase of stocks in the company. JADE TUR would provide the individual businesses a legal entity through which to operate and that would serve as a central clearing house, providing advertising, access to financing, and a centralized database of accommodations available through TUR-CASA (Rivas Río and Arce Arias 1993).

In July 1993, the First Annual Meeting of Travel Agents and Small Tourism Entrepreneurs was hosted by CANAMET, JADE-TUR, and TUR-CASA. The President of TUR-CASA and sales manager of JADE TUR made a presentation to some 50 travel agents. Price lists for tours, housing, transport, and guides were distributed along with guidelines for commissions for travel agents and reservation policies as well as a newsletter for JADE TUR, printed in English.

It is still early to draw conclusions about the success or failure of TUR-CASA and JADE-TUR. However, other questions can and should be examined. A global examination of tourism micro-enterprises, especially those developed by women, should provide an overall context within which to examine the special case of TUR-CASA. Included in this examination should be consideration of local housing opportunities in the tourism industry, with particular regard to the ecotourism movement currently evidenced in areas rich in ecological diversity, such as Costa Rica. A study of the historical division of labor according to gender should help to place in perspective the issue of why women would become involved in tourist housing rather than some other form of economic activity. Finally, an investigation of recent economic and political changes in Costa Rica should allow an examination of TUR-CASA in light of its potential role as an indicator of change in the fabric of Costa Rican society. □ □

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The Female Gender in Greek Agrotourism

Olga Iakovidou

Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Caroline Turner

Breakthrough, Greece

The concept of agrotourism, as used in Greece, embraces tourism activities carried out in non-urban regions by individuals mainly employed in the primary or secondary sector of the economy. Such activities typically involve small tourism units of family or cooperative type, which offer accommodations, goods, and/or other services and provide a supplementary income for rural families and/or an independent income for women living in rural areas (Iakovidou 1992). Agrotourism is conceived as means of bringing opportunity to areas of natural beauty, traditional culture, and historical interest, by using these resources to stimulate the revitalization of rural economies in decline, while at the same time preserving cultural heritage and the natural environment (Turner 1993).

This research note, based on the results of secondary and field research by the authors, focuses upon the contribution of women's cooperatives to the development of agrotourism in Greece. Women's agrotourism cooperatives in Greece are based on developing rural women's traditional skills in managing the household unit—never before recognized as such—into professional capacity. Furthermore, rural women who are usually non-paid working members of the family farm may find in these cooperatives a source of independent income. Women's agrotourism cooperatives in Greece offer bed and breakfast, comprising accommodation in traditionally furnished, standard rooms