



NORDPLUS



The challenges of staging and performing rural experiences

Ester Bardone is a researcher at the [Department of Ethnology](#) of Tartu University Institute for Cultural Research and Fine Arts. Recently she defended her thesis, "[My Farm is My Stage: A Performance Perspective on Rural Tourism and Hospitality Services in Estonia](#)", and now continues studying rural tourism and hospitality entrepreneurship in Estonia.

Ester Bardone writes that Estonian farm tourism enterprises have emerged since the mid-1990s and they are quite different from many European counterparts in the sense that the former lack the symbiosis of agricultural production and tourism that still persists in many European countries with a longer tradition in farm-based tourism or with different rural policies.

A performance perspective on rural tourism and hospitality enterprises did not only reveal the potential of using natural and cultural resources and individual creativity in experience-producing business, but likewise indicated several challenges and dilemmas.

Firstly, entrepreneurs may attempt to stage rural tourism experiences, but in reality clients' experiences and impressions are also ephemeral, unpredictable, and personally as well as culturally constituted. One cannot undermine the role of improvisation and creativity of both the hosts and guests – experiences emerge not only in designed settings and events, but potentially in all everyday situations.

Secondly, there are likewise several personal costs often overlooked in tourism literature that relate to **self-commodification** of the micro-scale rural tourism entrepreneur, who often has to fight with the blurring boundaries of private and public life, as well as with the emotional burden of experience-providing service work.

Finally, each tourism enterprise operates in a particular socio-economic context, and the particular experience may be influenced by the overall experience the milieu provides – beautiful nature next to uncanny Soviet collective farm heritage, or the success stories of small entrepreneurs juxtaposed with aging or unemployed neighbors. The latter likewise perform rural life in Estonia.

More on <http://blog.ut.ee/my-farm-is-my-stage-insights-into-estonian-rural-tourism/>