

Stability and variety – Products, organization and institutionalization in farm tourism

Magnar Forbord^{a,*}, Markus Schermer^b, Karin Griesmair^c

^a Centre for Rural Research, University Centre Dragvoll, N-7491 Trondheim, Norway

^b Institute of Sociology, University of Innsbruck, Universitätsstraße 15, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria

^c University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Gregor Mendel Straße 33, A-1180 Vienna, Austria

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ABSTRACT

Products, collective organization and institutions are factors that shape farm tourism. The aim of this paper is to present new knowledge of the way these factors are designed and provide lessons for management in the sector. Research findings to date suggest these factors are varied but similarities within findings exist. However, while there have been a number of studies on the importance of each of the factors, few studies focus on the combined impact of them. This study attempts to go some way toward filling this knowledge gap. The empirical cases for the study are derived from three European locations: two regions in the Alps: North Tyrol in Austria and South Tyrol in Italy, and Norway. The breadth and variety of the product range differ. We also find clear contrasts between the cases when it comes to the structure of farm tourism organizations. However, the goals of the organizations are quite similar emphasizing three types of tasks: marketing, competence building and quality assurance. Concerning systems for quality assurance, a type of institutional factor, two cases are similar, while the third case (Norway) has a different (less strict) system. Based on a comparative analysis of the cases we develop a conceptual model showing the interdependence between products, organization and institutions in the farm tourism sector, and the influence of market and location. We provide some examples of application of the findings by various actors and agencies in tourism.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale and organization of the study

Farm tourism requires management of several factors on as well as off the farm. Each individual factor and the combination of factors need attention. Doing this in a good way can give benefits for firms and the farm tourism sector. In this study the aim is to shed light on and provide lessons on three specific factors: products, collective organization, and institutional arrangements. The product is a central factor. Having something to offer is basic in any commercial activity and the composition and quality of the offer is an ongoing issue. Organization of activities on the farm is also necessary in order to provide farm tourism. Perhaps not so obvious, and less studied, is the collective organization of farm tourism above the level of the single farm. As the sector of farm tourism has

developed (Busby & Rendle, 2000), various ways to institutionalize the sector thereby making it more stable have also come into being, for example in the form of quality schemes (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). In many cases these and other institutions have been developed by collective organizations and are maintained by them. These three types of factors constitute, both individually and together, central aspects of the farm tourism sector and affect individual farms and agencies within the sector. While many studies of each of these factors, and aspects of them, have been reported, there are few studies on the interdependence of the factors in the context of farm tourism. Moreover, as the conditions for farm tourism differ from country to country and region to region, there is reason to believe that the factors and their interdependence need to be handled in different ways in different locations. However, the knowledge of these “various ways” and the reason behind them is also sparse.

In this paper we make an effort to fill, at least partly, this knowledge gap by undertaking a comparative case study. Empirically, the study focuses on farm tourism in three specific locations in Europe: two regions in the Alps; North Tyrol in the western part of Austria and South Tyrol in northern Italy, plus Norway, a country in northern Europe. The study has three aims. The first aim is to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +47 73591736; fax: +47 73591275.

E-mail addresses: magnar.forbord@bygdeforskning.no (M. Forbord), markus.schermer@uibk.ac.at (M. Schermer), karin.griesmair@brennercom.net (K. Griesmair).

describe the farm tourism sector across the chosen locations in terms of the three factors product range, collective organization and institutional arrangements. The second aim is, based on the descriptions, to compare central findings in the cases, analyze interdependencies between the factors and develop an analytical model of an institutionalized farm tourism sector. The third aim is to provide lessons from the study for practical management in the sector when it comes to product strategies, organization and institutional solutions.

The paper is structured in the following way: First we briefly describe the history of farm tourism and the situation today in various countries (Section 1.2). We then establish a theoretical framework based on the three central concepts of the paper: product, organization and institutions (Section 1.3). The objectives of the study are outlined in more detail in Section 1.4 in terms of specific research questions to be answered. In Section 2 an account of materials and methods (case-oriented comparison) is provided. In Section 3 we present the empirical data for the three locations (cases). In Section 4 we first compare the findings from the cases in terms of the three main concepts (Section 4.1), then present a conceptual model of the farm tourism sector (Section 4.2), before we propose some implications for management (Section 4.3). Conclusions are given in the last section (Section 4.4).

1.2. Background

Farm tourism can be viewed as a specific form of rural tourism and is defined by Nilsson (2002) as touristic activity in the countryside. He also states that tourism on farms is generally small-scale and the economic results not always good. On the other hand, combining production of agricultural products and tourism can lead to more efficient use of labor on a farm (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005). Moreover, in popular tourist areas farm tourism can give significant income (Sharpley & Vass, 2006).

From the beginning farm tourism was an activity taking place mostly on each individual farm without much co-ordination among farms, but in some cases with some regulation by the state.¹ The offer included basically the same elements as today: accommodation, food serving, experiences and to some extent transport.² Over time farm tourism developed, and became more organized, standardized, but also more diverse. Studies of farm tourism in different parts of the world paint a picture of variations between countries. Such studies have been carried out in Europe (Davies & Gilbert, 1992; Di Domenico & Miller, 2007; Embacher, 1994; Evans & Ilbery, 1992b; Gössling & Mattsson, 2002; Haugen & Vik, 2008; Hjalager, 1996; Oppermann, 1996; Sonnino, 2004), North-America (Veeck & Veeck, 2006; Weaver & Fennell, 1997), Asia (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005), and Oceania (Pearce, 1990).³ Austria, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany are reported to have high numbers of farms with tourism (Bessière, 1998; Busby & Rendle, 2000; Dernoï, 1983), indicating that there are other countries with a lower “density” of farm tourism.

¹ For example, regulation of leisure salmon fishing in Norway was introduced in the 1850s.

² Written sources describe examples of tourism on farms as far back as the 19th century. For example, in Germany the phenomenon is dated back to the mid 19th century (Oppermann, 1996). In Norway the coach-law adopted in 1816 led many farmers along the main roads to start coaching inns (Hellesnes & Viken, 1991; Jacobsen, 2002). From the 1830s, Norwegian rivers enticed English anglers from the upper middle class (Aas, 2001; Norske lakseelver, 2006). Often the anglers stayed on farms during the visit (Høylandet kommune, 1995).

³ The range of research on farm tourism has over the years become great, and the references cited here are not exhaustive.

By 1900, farm tourism had become an organized industry in parts of Europe (Frater, 1983). The general increase in tourism after World War II, caused among other things by the introduction of holiday legislation and a rise in income (Dernoï, 1983; Oppermann, 1996), also had consequences for tourism on farms, which increased in terms of volume. Authorities, politicians and farm organizations started to view tourism on farms as an interesting new source of income in rural areas – a form of diversification. This view gained momentum in the 1990s with more emphasis on rural and regional development in the new agricultural policy in the EU (Hall, 2005; Nilsson, 2002; St.prp. nr. 8, 1992–1993), at a time when employment in traditional agriculture was decreasing (Almås, 1994; Evans & Ilbery, 1992b; van der Ploeg & Long, 1994). This is a view that still persists (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). Another driver in the development of tourism on farms has been gender; women on farms have started tourism as a way of securing their own income and obtaining professional status on the farm (Haugen & Vik, 2008; Nilsson, 2002).

Austria is considered the leading country in Europe with respect to farm tourism (Nilsson, 2002). In the Austrian Alps, farmers established the first tourism organizations in the early 1970s. In 1971, regional farmers in Salzkammergut in Austria started to promote farm holidays, and in 1972 the first provincial farm holiday association was established in Styria (Embacher, 1994). A national organization was founded by the provincial associations in 1991. In Scandinavia, a pilot project in Skåne in 1989 (“Bo på Lantgård”), supported among others by the farmers’ union, eventually led to the formation of a national organization for farm tourism in Sweden (Gössling & Mattsson, 2002). In Norway, a national organization (“Norsk Bygdeturisme”) was set up in 1997 with support from the Ministry of agriculture, among others (Statens landbruksbank, 1999). Development of organizations for farm tourism has taken place in other European countries as well.

Hence, by the end of the 20th century, Busby and Rendle (2000) observed a transition from “tourism on farms” to “farm tourism”; tourism as a supplementary commercial activity on farms had become a sector in its own right. However, this observation does not imply that farm tourism has a similar design and equal importance in all locations (Nilsson, 2002). Rather, given differences in conditions such as nature, volume of tourism, style of agriculture, history and support from authorities and organizations, we should expect variation in farm tourism by location.

1.3. Conceptual framework

The *product* is a central part of any industry. Marketing literature defines a product as: “[...] anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. It includes physical objects, services, places, organizations, and ideas” (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1999, p. 274). Intuitively what tourism offers is human experience (Smith, 1994). From the tourist’s point of view, the experience may be the result of many interacting offers, of which some are given by nature and therefore are “public goods”, and others are delivered by business actors and can be regarded as “commercial goods”. A tourism product may be defined as any offer facilitating travel and activity of individuals away from their usual home environment. Smith (1994) emphasizes the holistic character of tourism and has developed a generic model in which the tourism product is portrayed as five concentric rings (see Fig. 1).

At the core is the physical site, such as a natural landscape (cf. the term ‘place’ in the definition above). The core can be more or less enhanced through service and hospitality. These elements are often delivered by tourism suppliers and hence constitute or are part of commercial goods. The product may be further extended if

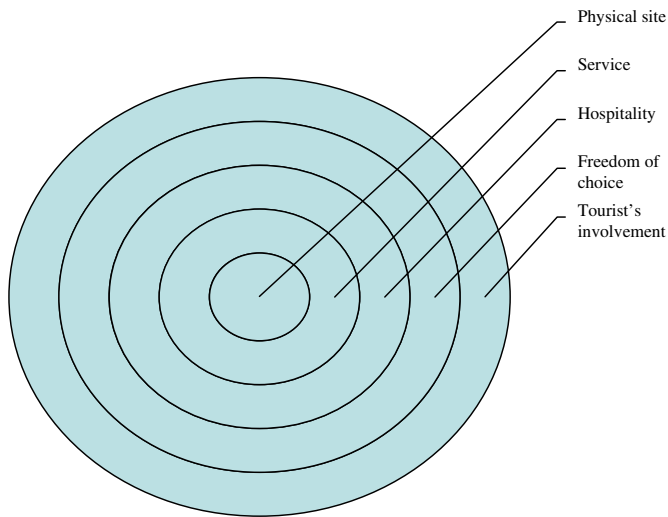


Fig. 1. The tourism product as five concentric rings. Source: Smith (1994).

the tourist entertains freedom of choice during the travel (the fourth ring). The fifth and outermost ring is the tourist's possibility of physical and/or mental involvement during the travel. Suppliers have more or less control over the various rings (elements) in the "holistic" tourist product. Since the purpose of this study is to gain overview rather than detail, we employ the product concept rather pragmatically and focus simply on food serving, accommodation and experience as important product types in farm tourism. Such a categorization is also commonly used in general statistical descriptions of tourism.

Tourism products would not be available without *organization*. In general: "To organize is to assemble ongoing interdependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes" (Weick, 1979, p. 3). Although such a process can take place without any formal organization (Scott & Davis, 2007), there is little reason to believe that formal organizing does not play a role in shaping the farm tourism sector. Studies have shown that successful farm tourism firms work co-operatively, rather than individualistically and competitively (Che, Veeck, & Veeck, 2005; Hill & Busby, 2002), and that being involved with associations contributes positively to the gross income on farm tourism farms (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). Thus, co-operation in the marketing of specific themes in rural tourism has been recognized (Meyer-Cech, 2005), with studies of co-operation in the marketing of farm tourism having been carried out in Britain (Clarke, 1996; Evans & Ilbery, 1992a) and in Ireland (Gorman, 2005). However, writers have also portrayed tourism as a chaotic system (McKercher, 1999). A similar point of view is maintained by Tremblay (1998), who argues that models of industrial organization, such as value chains, are inappropriate for tourism. He proposes instead a perspective which emphasizes the co-ordination of changing technological and marketing competencies through network relationships. Such an understanding of tourism may be fruitful, however given the purpose of this paper, we describe only the formal side of organization in the farm tourism sector, especially goal specification and formal structure (Scott & Davis, 2007). According to Meyer and Rowan (1991), while specified goals and formal structures may or may not reflect actual behavior in an organization or organizational field, these elements do tell something about how a form of business activity, in this case farm tourism, is institutionalized.

Intuitively, the word *institution* suggests entities in society that exist beyond single individuals, are permanent, and have a collective function in a specific area of life. Farm tourism has, at least in

certain places, now existed for so long a period of time that one can expect institutions to have developed.⁴ Insofar as institutions exist they will have connections to products and organizations in the sector. The dictionary defines institutionalization as: "the process, as well as the outcome of the process, in which social activities become regularized and routinized as stable, social-structural features" (Collins, 1995). More precisely, institutionalization is "the emergence of orderly, stable, *socially integrating* patterns out of unstable, loosely organized, or narrowly technical activities" (Selznick, 1992, p. 232, italics in original). Examples of institutions in tourism include national tourist boards, well-known trademarks for specific tourist destinations, and informal norms of appropriate behavior in tourist areas.

Institutionalization is part of a deep propensity in human nature to habituate activities. This gives relief and liberates resources that can be used for innovation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). So while the starting point of an institution may be the adoption of a formal rule, institutions also have to build on a shared history of human interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967); an institution cannot simply be decided. An act that is institutionalized is objective and exterior, but to a more or less degree (Zucker, 1991). This means that institutions are social products, and institutionalization has therefore been defined as the development of values tied to otherwise technical tasks (Selznick, 1957).

In this study, where the aim is to overview and compare, there is little room for extensive analysis of institutions and institutional processes. We limit the analysis to specific institutional arrangements that can be found in farm tourism. These arrangements are of different kinds. A categorization that we find practical to apply is a distinction in organization theory between regulative elements, normative elements and cultural-cognitive elements (Scott & Davis, 2007). Regulative elements point to institutions in the form of political and legal frameworks – laws and rules. Normative elements refer to moral frameworks – shared norms that define appropriate behavior. An important type of norm concerns quality (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). Views on appropriate quality in farm tourism may exist informally and be more or less shared. In some places formal systems for quality assurance have been established. These may be voluntary (managed by an organization) or compulsory (given by law). The quality of farm tourism products as well as the attitudes among the providers toward quality assurance vary (Di Domenico & Miller, 2007; Hill & Busby, 2002). Cultural-cognitive elements refer to the common symbolic systems and shared meanings that support collective action. In the empirical descriptions that follow, we concentrate on certain elements within the different forms of institutionalization: legal regulation, certification systems,⁵ and the use of signs (see e.g. Lash & Urry, 1994) and symbols such as language (Belhassen & Caton, 2009).

1.4. Objectives and research questions

The objectives of the study are to answer these research questions:

1. What characterizes the output (products) from farm tourism in the chosen locations? Is there a broad range of products or a narrower, more specialized offer?

⁴ Hjalager (1997) regards institutions as one of the areas (types) of innovation in tourism.

⁵ Among studies that show the relevance and use of certification in tourism are Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, and Lloréns-Montes (2007), Dodds (2008), and Font (2002).

2. How is the sector of farm tourism organized above the level of individual farms, especially when it comes to goals and structure of the organizations?
3. To what extent and in what forms have institutions within the categories legislation, quality assurance, and common symbols been developed in farm tourism, and what role and importance do they have?
4. How are products, collective organizations and various institutions connected, and why do we eventually observe variations in these factors between locations?
5. What implications for management can be extracted from the findings?

Pursuing these objectives will fulfill the aims of the study outlined in Section 1.1.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Case-oriented comparison

This study is an investigation of certain theoretical and substantial questions pertaining to farm tourism as an organized sector. A case study approach is a desirable research strategy when the purpose is to understand complex social phenomena, like organizational and managerial processes and the maturation of industries (Yin, 2003). In this project we apply a multiple-case design (Yin, 2003). The investigation relates to three delimited cases – three geographical and also administrative areas (locations).⁶ A case study gives good opportunities to bring particular historical, cultural and geographical conditions into the analysis (Ragin, 1987). The world is complex, and often a factor's effect on a certain outcome varies by context. A case study therefore provides a method to simplify complexity by examining similarities and differences among a limited number of cases. More specifically, a case study provides possibilities to describe how a particular configuration of factors produces certain outcomes. With more than one case – a multiple-case design – it is possible to overcome some of the limitations of case studies. Multiple cases make it possible to consider different combinations of conditions and provide alternative explanations for an outcome (Ragin, 1987).

2.2. Study areas

The study areas (cases) have some similarities in their natural environment and agricultural structure. All three have a high proportion of mountainous landscape and rather small-scale farming. Concerning tourism, North Tyrol is probably the region in Europe, and possibly in the world, with the highest proportion of farms engaged in tourism (Embacher, 1994; Gønzc, Remøe, Sæter, & Vonlanthen, 1994). Norway however also has a coastal landscape, is more sparsely populated and has a larger area of outlying fields than the Alps. Norway has a significantly lower and more scattered "traffic" of tourists and a somewhat shorter history of tourism. Significant differences can also be found in the level of organization. North Tyrol has a strong branch organization at the provincial level integrated into a national association. South Tyrol is a province that is home to an ethnic minority of German speaking population within Italy, and has extensive regional autonomy. Farm

tourism in South Tyrol is only organized at the provincial level, that is, within the province. In Norway the branch organization of farm tourism is strongest and most operative at the national level, making it more relevant to focus on the national level in this case. Thus, it is the organizational level of farm tourism which sets the delineation of the case study areas, rather than public authority borders.

2.3. Procedure

Employing a case study research design often requires the collection and combined use of multiple types of data (data triangulation) (Yin, 2003). In this way, case studies differ from pure qualitative research. Interviews and document analysis (including online sources), and to some extent participant observation, formed the empirical basis for this study (Bryman, 2004). The cases reported in Section 3 of this paper all, to varying degrees, build on interviews and documents. The North Tyrolean case is presented first as this case is built on the most extensive data set, including many personal interviews. For the South Tyrolean case (second part of Section 3) participant observation was a secondary source of data. The Norwegian case (third and last part of Section 3) builds more narrowly on analysis of documents and online sources. Variation in data sources for the cases presented here is a result of the coming together of several different projects in this paper. The idea for the paper arose during a meeting between two of the authors in 2007. At this point, the interviews in the Tyrolean cases had already been carried out, aimed at a somewhat different, but related research topic. All the data for the Norwegian case, and most of the documentary data (including online data) for the Tyrolean cases were collected after this meeting, primarily in 2009. In all the cases, the various types of data available were used in combination in order to produce the case descriptions. The three conceptual dimensions (see Section 1.3) were employed to obtain a uniform presentation of the cases. This was all the more important since the cases built on different empirical bases.

The main material for the case study of North Tyrol originates from a case study conducted within the 6th framework EU-funded research project "Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives, COFAMI" (Schermer & Rieder, 2007). Within this case study, the researchers conducted 26 in-depth interviews with various stakeholders concerned with farm holidays in North Tyrol. These included members and functionaries of the branch organization as well as non-member farmers, local politicians and tourism experts. In addition, a number of strategy papers were analyzed.

The material for South Tyrol is based on data, mainly documentary analysis, collected by Karin Griefsmair (2005) as part of her Bachelors thesis. Empirical knowledge of this case was expanded while the author worked as an employee in the branch organization for farm tourism in South Tyrol from 2005 to 2009. For the purposes of this paper, this knowledge is treated as participant information. This material was supplemented with information from relevant web pages reviewed in 2009. In the case of Norway, all the data was gathered specifically in connection to the present paper. This case description is based mostly on documents and online sources complemented with a semi-structured telephone interview with the marketing secretary of the branch organization ("HANEN") undertaken in 2009. A draft of the description was later read and approved by the secretary-general of the organization. A couple of research reports also provided data for the Norwegian case.

In general, documents such as bylaws, criteria declarations, press releases and brand symbols were identified on web pages of the branch organizations, public authorities and others, and

⁶ The word 'location' may be associated with the expression 'local place', for example a municipality. In this paper we use 'location' as a more general concept with much the same meaning as 'geographical area'. Two of the locations (geographical areas) that we study have form of regions (provinces), while the third location is on a "higher" geographical level, a country.

reviewed. Statistical information was retrieved mainly from the internet, including, in some cases, secondary data for further calculation and analysis by the researchers. The collection of data from online sources was undertaken simultaneously for the three cases (primarily from May to November 2009) to ensure consistency in data collection.

2.4. Analysis

The categorization of the case study material (Section 3) follows the theoretical categorization described in Section 1 (product range, organization and institutional factors). In addition, the description of a contextual factor – relative importance of tourism – is provided. Each case is described separately in order to maintain the holistic character of the cases (Ragin, 1987). The analysis (Section 4) is organized around the theoretical categories. In each category, differences and similarities between the cases are shown and factors with potential to explain differences and similarities are considered. Analysis based on theoretical concepts contributes to relatively parsimonious explanations rather than extensive knowledge (Ragin, 1987).

3. Results

3.1. North Tyrol (Austria)

3.1.1. Product range

In the 1960s, farm tourism to a large extent equaled cheap accommodation. The CEO of the farm tourism organization (Urlaub am Bauernhof)⁷ in North Tyrol recalls: “*In the beginning private bed & breakfast operators often were not telling that they ran a farm. Farm holidays were considered smelling, dirty and cheap*”. In the past 15–20 years however, farm tourism has been developed into a specific professional tourist offer. Accommodation is still central, although the type of accommodation has changed. Today (2010), 50 percent of the beds are rented as bed & breakfasts (B&B) and 50 percent as self contained apartments. Food is provided for breakfast (in the case of B&B), ideally from the farms’ own resources. Others often provide the possibility of purchasing farm products, but the provision of food is never seen as a tourism activity on its own. There are plans to foster closer ties between UaB and special products. The president says: “*A mutual co-operation between specialties and tourism under a common brand would be necessary, but requires still a lot of effort*”. Experiences and adventure have become increasingly significant and add to the attractiveness of the accommodation offer. Examples of these include visits to alpine summer farms, tobogganing in winter, and courses in handicrafts – such as making candles or felting with sheep’s wool (Urlaub am Bauernhof in Österreich, 2009a). Such activities are partly organized collectively by “regional alliances” of farm tourism operators. A new topic coming up in many interviews is health. One member says: “*We have a responsibility for the people that they recreate themselves also when it comes to health... We feel that they very often come quite worn out to us.*” Health services can for example be provision of healthy food from organic farming and transferring knowledge about the use of herbs. Offering classical wellness infrastructure like whirlpools or saunas is rarer.

3.1.2. Relative importance

North Tyrol has a population of around 630 000, and receives about 9 million tourists with 43 million overnight stays (guest

nights) annually (2008). This means that the annual number of guest nights per capita is 68. In 2008, the number of tourists on farms totaled 100 000, resulting in 660 000 overnight stays.

3.1.3. Organization of the branch

There is a national organization for farm tourism called “Urlaub am Bauernhof” (“Holidays on the farm”). This organization has departments in each province of which North Tyrol is one (Urlaub am Bauernhof in Österreich, 2009a).⁸ Membership in the association is voluntary. Altogether there are around 4000 farms (out of a total of approximately 15 000 farms) within the province of North Tyrol offering accommodation. Of these, 430 farms are members of the association “Urlaub am Bauernhof”. The share of active farmers in relation to all inhabitants is 2.3 percent.

3.1.3.1. Goal specifications. The main objective of the association “Urlaub am Bauernhof” is to create a high quality and professional tourist offer for and with the member farm enterprises. Specific goals include the following topics:

- The professional marketing of member farms via the Internet, direct marketing, media contacts, fairs, and catalogues;
- The quality management and assurance via standardized quality categorization (including regular controls), specialization (into different special offers) and brand management;
- A price policy to fix minimum prices in order to prevent dumping prices.

3.1.3.2. Organizational structure. The association operates in close connection with the Chamber of Agriculture on a provincial level, and has close ties to the federal Ministry of Agriculture on a national level. The provincial tourism marketing board is a strong partner for the farm tourism sector. Although farm tourism associations in the provinces – such as North Tyrol – act rather independently, they also share some specialist advisors, a common logo and Internet appearance. Nationwide newsletters and magazines provide information to members. The quality standards are fixed at the national level.

At the provincial level, the association provides a number of services to its members. They issue a catalogue, provide market intelligence (together with the provincial tourism marketing board), act as a lobbying organization, and offer professional advice and courses (e.g. computer literacy, business issues, language courses, etc.). Furthermore, they operate an incoming travel agency directed specifically to niche markets where farms might have language problems (as in the case of tourists from Spain, France, Israel, Greece, etc.). The district association provides and organizes excursions, meetings and courses at the local level. The members especially value educational offers, as well as the Internet platform for offers and as a source for member information. They clearly emphasize the importance of a strong brand and good public relations. It also appears that the different levels co-operate quite well. The president of the provincial UaB organization observes: “*Regardless where in Austria the farm is, the ones offering holiday on farm act in concert.*”

⁷ In the remainder of the paper we sometimes use the acronym UaB for Urlaub am Bauernhof, see also Section 3.1.3.

⁸ Austria is a federal state with four administrative levels: the national level, the provincial level, the district level and the municipal level. Italy has five levels as there is a regional level “between” the national level and the provincial level. For example, South Tyrol is a province in the region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. Norway has three administrative levels: the national level, the county level and the municipal level.

3.1.4. Regulation – legal aspects

No specific law exists for farm tourism, and there is only a general federal law on non-commercial bed and breakfast (up to 10 beds). Such enterprises do not need a commercial license. Most of the farms have fewer than ten beds, as enterprises that offer more than ten beds are regarded as commercial tourist enterprises and as such, have tax consequences. About 20 percent of the members of the association “Urlaub am Bauernhof” fall into this category, but all of them operate a farm as well. The size of farms varies, as does the production orientation, although all members are required to raise livestock as this is regarded part of the consumer expectation.

3.1.5. Normative forces

3.1.5.1. Common understanding. On their home page, Urlaub am Bauernhof in Austria present this type of holiday as “echter Urlaub” (“authentic holidays”) (Urlaub am Bauernhof in Österreich, 2009a). This notion of authenticity combines issues of traditional hospitality (like the family atmosphere) with typical farm features (animals all year round, natural products direct from the farm) and living culture and traditions. As the wife of the provincial president says: “We offer participation in everyday farm life.”

3.1.5.2. Certification. Certification is organized at the national level. New criteria for categorizing farm tourism were introduced on 1.1.2009 (Urlaub am Bauernhof in Österreich, 2009b). There has since been a separation of the function of advice (by advisor of the chamber) and the function of classification (external commission). A flower system to grade farm tourism enterprises has been in place since the founding of the national association for farm tourism in 1991 (Embacher, 1994). One flower is not used. Two flowers indicate “sufficient”, three show “good”, and four symbolize “very good”. The farm experience is becoming more important, as guests want to participate, consume farm products and have animals around. There is now more freedom for individual development of farms – different criteria differ in relevance according to the preferences of guests. The founder of the (farm tourism) organization in North Tyrol emphasizes: “Certification should be a checklist, not a corset..., otherwise it may lead to a loss of spontaneity and closeness to the guest.” Or as the present president formulates it: “We create a common recipe for the soup, but every farm has its own spice to add.”

Cleanliness is ranked very highly. The number of criteria has also been reduced, from 100 to 80, and more closely reflect the specialization of farms (like arable farming etc). Luxury offers (such as swimming pools) have little influence on the categorization (Landwirtschaftskammer Tirol, 2009). Tourist farms are expected to have farm animals (not just horses) in order to be members of “Urlaub am Bauernhof” and be presented in the UaB catalogue. The balance between remaining a farm and offering holidays is sometimes delicate. As the CEO phrases it: “While in former times the farmer was too much farmer [not enough entrepreneur], now often the farm wife is not enough farmer anymore.” By this the CEO means that it may be a problem if the farm wife is a highly professional tourism entrepreneur, but does not know much about the daily operations on the farm.

As membership in the branch organization is voluntary, it gives members the self-image of belonging to the “avant-garde” of farm tourism. No formal education is needed to do farm tourism in Austria. However, members of the branch association are interested in further education and the association tries to create an innovative milieu. Improving computer knowledge has been one important task. The present CEO recalls:

In 1998 I stated that we by 2000 would have a computer on every second farm offering farm holiday, and the members

laughed at me, but already by 1999 we had reached this... Furthermore, the use of the computer is mainly a female task.

Courses are also offered for professionalization and provide a certificate in offering holidays on farms, but these courses are not formally required for providing the activities.

3.1.6. Cultural-cognitive factors

3.1.6.1. Common understanding. Farm tourism is understood as a particular type of tourism, as something for families and nature lovers, and has a green image. Even though farm tourism can have positive social effects (e.g. on farm succession), the economic and commercial sides of this activity are the most emphasized; for example, the role of farm tourism in complementing income on farms, and as a female activity in rural areas.

3.1.6.2. Signs and symbols. Concerning signs and symbols, the brand name “Urlaub am Bauernhof” recalls a picture which is transferred even to non-members (see Fig. 2). Originally there was a provincial logo in North Tyrol which was later substituted by the national logo in Fig. 2. The logo of the association is not very strong, however.

3.2. South Tyrol (Italy)

3.2.1. Product range

Farm holidays in South Tyrol are basically divided into three categories (Sordini, 2008): (1) the provision of accommodation for short duration including camping, whereby accommodation can be offered on the farm itself or at alpine pasture huts which are owned by the farm family; (2) the provision of food and alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, in which at least 80 percent of the food must be produced by farmers (including co-operatives) of the region, and at least 30 percent of the food must be produced and/or processed on the farm. Here, there are three types of food-serving enterprises: the “Buschenschank” (wine producing farms), the “Hofschank” (for all other agricultural products, except wine) and the “Almschank” (alpine pasture huts which serve food). Farms can also offer party services. The third category relates to (3) the organization of cultural and leisure activities, including riding, hiring out



Fig. 2. Logo for Urlaub am Bauernhof in Austria.

horses, carriage trips, farm visits, petting zoos, museums, supervising children or elderly people, on-farm schooling, accommodation for animals, etc. The number of farms offering each type of activity is shown in Table 1.

As this table shows, most farm tourist enterprises offer only accommodation, while only a small percentage of farms are engaged in other activities.

3.2.2. Relative importance

South Tyrol has an area of 7400 km² and 493 000 inhabitants (in 2007) (Autonome Provinz Bozen Südtirol – Landesinstitut für Statistik, 2009). In total there are about 10 000 tourist enterprises in South Tyrol. In the tourist year 2007 (a tourist year runs from November to October), there was a total of more than 27 million overnight stays. There were 17 million foreign tourists, and 10 million domestic tourists. The number of holiday guest nights per capita is 55.

In South Tyrol there are about 26 000 farms. Around 21 000 of them are active in the sense that they are run as distinct enterprises. Over 21 000 farms are members of the Südtiroler Bauernbund (SBB), the provincial farmers' association (Südtiroler Bauernbund, 2009). About 3000 farms offer holiday activities. In the tourist year 2007, farms had a total of more than 1.6 million overnight stays. Of these, 1.1 million were made by foreign tourists and 500 000 by domestic (Italian) tourists. It must also be taken into consideration that the Italian nationals from outside South Tyrol are almost seen as international as they speak another language and have other cultures and lifestyles.

3.2.3. Organization of the branch

The Südtiroler Bauernbund (SBB) serves as the branch organization for farm tourism in South Tyrol, and is also the provincial farmers' association. In Italy, while there is a national branch organization for farms – the “Coldiretti” – this organization plays no role in South Tyrol due to the special historic situation of the region.⁹ Over 21 000 farms are members of the Südtiroler Bauernbund (Südtiroler Bauernbund, 2009), meaning that nearly all farms are members even though membership is not mandatory. The SBB receives income through member fees and support from the regional government. The SBB provides several services for the farmers, such as tax and law consultation, business consultation, support system, further education, and marketing. The SBB has also started a specialization program in farm tourism.

3.2.3.1. Goal specifications. The objective of the department of marketing in SBB is to support farm holiday enterprises in relation to advertising and consult to them. The SBB offers marketing tools to farmers, on the Internet (www.roterhahn.it) as well as in a catalogue. About 1200 farms make use of this marketing, which occurs under a common logo of the Red Rooster. The department of marketing is also engaged in organizing fairs, festivals and other public relations activities.

3.2.3.2. Organizational structure. The SBB is divided into several departments, of which the department of marketing is one. Work

⁹ Roughly speaking, South Tyrol is the part of Tyrol located south of the Brenner Pass. Until World War I this part of Tyrol together with the rest of Tyrol (today's North Tyrol and East Tyrol) formed one province belonging to Austria (Brook-Shepherd, 1997; Hanisch, 1994). The peace negotiations following World War I in 1919 resulted in the southern part of Tyrol becoming part of Italy. German identity and culture is still important in the province. In 2001, 64 percent of the population belonged to the German language group (Benvenuto, 2007). Since the 1970s, the province has obtained extensive autonomy (Bonell & Winkler, 2010). For example, South Tyrol retains about 90 percent of all levied taxes (Alcock, 2001).

Table 1
Number of activities of different types in farm tourism in South Tyrol.^a

Type of activity	Number of farms
Accommodation	2804
Accommodation at alpine pasture huts	20
Food serving (“Hofschank”)	213
Food serving (“Buschenschank”)	96
Food serving (“Almschank”)	124
Organization of cultural and leisure activities	149
Total	3284

^a Per 15 October 2008.

related to holidays on farms constitutes 90 percent of this department's activities.

The department of marketing has two important co-operation partners. One is the South Tyrol Marketing Organization (SMG) (Südtirol Marketing, 2009) which is engaged in international advertising and marketing. The other is the Export Organization of South Tyrol (EOS) (Export Organisation Südtirol der Handelskammer Bozen, 2009), an international marketing and trade support organization.

3.2.4. Regulation – legal aspects

The organization of farm holidays in South Tyrol is based on federal level legislation in Italy concerning farm tourism¹⁰ (Legge del 5 dicembre 1985, n. 730 – Disciplina dell'agriturismo) and on regional laws. The most important law is the “Landesgesetz vom 19. September 2008, Nr. 7 – Regelung des Urlaub auf dem Bauernhof”. This legislation aims to support agriculture in less favored regions, to enhance valorization of farm products, to support the natural environment, and to support local traditions and culture. The law defines farm tourism as provision of accommodation and hospitality (including gastronomy services) to guests by agricultural entrepreneurs (including co-operatives) and the organization of cultural and leisure activities and party service. Specific requests in the law are:

- The activity must be located on the farm, and the working time on the activity must amount to less than the time spent on farm work;
- Professional training is obligatory for farmers who would like to start a farm holiday business;
- Every farm must be classified (i.e. graded for quality).

The juridical and administrative issues of holidays on farms are dealt with by the provincial agricultural administration and the department of agricultural infrastructure (the “Assessorat für Landwirtschaft – Amt für Ländliches Bauwesen”). This department also handles the grading of quality.

Concerning economic support, the regional government supports infrastructure improvements (such as building, enlargement, improving rooms, improvement of sanitary conditions etc.) with 30–50 percent subsidies (Autonome Provinz Bozen Südtirol – Abteilung Landwirtschaft, 2009b).

3.2.5. Normative forces

3.2.5.1. Common values. The common values of the members of the “Red Rooster” are hospitality, high quality of the products and maintenance of the peasant culture and traditions of South Tyrol.

3.2.5.2. Certification. By law, farm holiday firms have to subject themselves to formal certification. The quality grading system for

¹⁰ In Italy and other Latin speaking countries farm tourism often goes under the name agriturismo.

accommodation enterprises is organized with flowers, in the same manner as in Austria, ranging from one to four flowers. One flower is used for farms which have rooms with one shared bathroom in the corridor. Two flowers indicate “sufficient/good”, three show “good/very good”, and four flowers are given to very good/excellent farms with special offers for the guests (activities etc.). Two advisors are employed to make the assessment and grade the farms, based on a questionnaire divided into four parts (Autonome Provinz Bozen Südtirol – Abteilung Landwirtschaft, 2009a). The first part collects general data about the farm, such as the number of rooms or apartments. The second part collects information about the buildings and the area surrounding the farm, like the state of repair of the house, state of the garden, parking, separation of waste, street signs, public transport etc. The third part is used for checking the condition of the rooms, apartments and the farm, such as the quality of the furnishings or additional offers such as washing machines. Quietness and cleanliness are also very important. The fourth part checks the service quality of the farm, and is probably the most important. Farms obtaining four flowers must have a very high score in this part. One example of a high quality service is the offer of breakfast (with homemade products) or a farm-information brochure. Great importance is given to having animals on the farm, and providing opportunities for guests to participate in, or experience, farm work. Farms should also have offers for children and organized activities outside the farm. Although no formal education is needed for farm tourism in South Tyrol, the new law demands that farmers offering farm tourism attend a course for professionalization, which provides a certificate in offering holidays on farms.

3.2.6. Cultural-cognitive factors

3.2.6.1. Common understanding. In the agricultural sector in South Tyrol, farm tourism has become very important and well recognized. It is seen as a very valuable opportunity to increase the income of the farm household. The tourism sector regards farm tourism as a competitor because of the privileged laws in favor of agricultural enterprises. Nevertheless, co-operation between the two is increasing.

3.2.6.2. Signs and symbols. In 1999, the brand name and symbol “Roter Hahn” was introduced (see Fig. 3). This symbol now stands for three product lines: farm holiday enterprises (“Urlaub auf dem Bauernhof”), food-serving enterprises (“Bäuerliche Schankbetriebe”) and quality farm products (“Qualitätsprodukte vom Bauern”). Any farm holiday enterprise has the right to use the symbol. The number of farms actually using it is unknown.



Fig. 3. Logo for farm tourism, food serving and quality farm products in South Tyrol.

3.3. Norway

3.3.1. Product range

Over 4000 farms in Norway offered tourism in 2006 (Forbord & Stræte, 2008). Accommodation was the most frequent activity (86%), followed by experience-based activities (72%) and food serving (63%) (Haugen & Vik, 2008). About ten percent of these farms are members in the branch organization HANEN,¹¹ which is also the organization representing farms producing local food. The most frequent tourism offers among members in HANEN are experience-based activities (62%), accommodation (58%), and serving food (42%) (Fjellhammer, 2006). Among those members providing accommodation, over 80 percent have more than ten beds (Kroken, Storstad, & Haugen, 2009). The average is 29 beds, and more than 80 percent offer these beds outside their living house, in apartments or similar. The web page of HANEN distinguishes some 40 types of experience-based activities, including, among others: contact with pet animals, guided tours on the farm, organized experiences in nature such as rafting, wild animal safaris, and dog racing, and cultural activities such as exhibitions and concerts (Kroken et al., 2009). As 90 percent of the members in HANEN carry out their tourist activities on a farm, the production of food on the farm is also an important activity for a large majority (Kroken et al., 2009). The range of products in Norwegian farm tourism is thus rather broad.¹²

3.3.2. Relative importance

In 2007, holiday and leisure guests spent 63.3 million nights in Norway (Innovasjon Norge, 2008). This figure includes commercial accommodation and private accommodation (own cabin, with family, friends etc.), but not business travelers. The population of Norway is 4.7 million and the number of guest nights per capita amounts to 13. Oppland is the county with most overnight stays, with 16 overnight stays in commercial accommodation (private accommodation not included) per capita in 2008 (Statistics Norway, 2009, table 05964). The national average was 6.

Official statistics on the number of overnight stays on farms in Norway are lacking. In a survey among members in HANEN in 2009, the total number of overnight stays was 212 956 among 146 respondents (Kroken et al., 2009). A prudent estimate including all farms with tourism may be 400 000 overnight stays annually. The total number of active farmers in Norway in 2006 was around 53 000 (Forbord & Stræte, 2008). The number of active farmers in relation to inhabitants is therefore around one percent. With 4300 active farms carrying out tourism, this means that around eight percent of active farmers are engaged in tourism (Forbord & Stræte, 2008).

3.3.3. Organization of the branch

HANEN is the branch organization for farm tourism in Norway, and also for producers of farm food and inland fishing. Many members are active in more than one of these domains. Before 2004, rural tourism and “food from the farm” had separate organizations, founded in 1997 (Statens landbruksbank, 1999) and 1998 (Borch, Kvam, & Stræte, 2005) respectively. The shorter name “HANEN” was introduced in 2009. The merger was carried out to obtain better secretary services, increase power and attention and contribute to a more comprehensive and attractive rural tourism

¹¹ HANEN literally means “The rooster”.

¹² At a seminar in Stjørdal, Norway, 19 May 2010 a former chairman in HANEN stated that when attending European farm tourism conferences, it was catchy how the farm tourism sector in Norway stood out in terms of broadness of products compared to other European countries.

offer (Norsk Bygdeturisme og Gardsmat og Norsk Innlandsfiskelag, 2009). 90 Percent of the members in HANEN have farms (Kroken et al., 2009). The rest are based around other rural resources such as summer pastures and fishermen's shacks. Membership in HANEN is voluntary.

3.3.3.1. Goal specifications. “[HANEN] is a nationwide member organization with the purpose to take care of the interests of firms that essentially base their activity on natural and cultural resources in rural areas” (HANEN, 2009a). HANEN aims to be a “clear and crisp” actor toward consumers domestically and abroad, and toward business partners (HANEN, 2009b). Among specific goals we find: common profiling and marketing, including brand building, development and follow-up of quality standards, raising competence among the members, and assisting and activating regional units. It also aims to promote contact with similar organizations and institutions.

3.3.3.2. Organizational structure. HANEN is a national organization with regional units. The members are direct members of the national organization and then assigned to a regional unit. The main bodies of HANEN are the national congress, the executive board, regional units and the administration (HANEN, 2009a). Most of the administration takes place at the headquarters in Oslo, which has a general manager and two co-workers. The regional units have little administrative resources. HANEN hires locals from the Norwegian Farmers' Union and co-operates closely with this organization. Ties are also strong to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Innovation Norway, a public institution which markets Norwegian tourism domestically and abroad. HANEN co-operates with tour operators nationally and internationally in organizing rural and farm experiences for tourists.

There are 12 regional units, covering one or two counties each. Tasks of the regional units include co-ordinating marketing and profiling of the organization regionally, furthering social and professional contact among members, recruiting new members and building contacts with local and regional authorities and organizations. HANEN encourages members and regional units to be members of the regional tourist associations, as these are the main marketers of the different regions as tourist destinations.

3.3.4. Regulation – legal aspects

There is no specific law regulating farm tourism in Norway, nor is there any special regulation on tax for accommodation firms, like the “ten beds rule” in Austria (see below). Farms doing tourism may nevertheless be affected by general regulations. In some cases, accommodation in remote mountain huts without electricity has run into problems concerning cleaning and hygienic requirements. In these cases solutions have normally been found in dialogue with the food authorities.

3.3.5. Normative forces

3.3.5.1. Common values. HANEN has culture, care and experience as core values (HANEN, 2009a). These values are intended to serve as a strategic tool for positioning in the market (HANEN, 2009c), and clarify the distinct character of farm food and farm tourism. Cultural values include local food, traditions, and distinctive character. Values concerning care include authenticity and responsibility toward the natural environment. Experience values include activity, diversity and proximity to animals and nature.

3.3.5.2. Certification. HANEN does not carry out any form of formal quality categorization of the members or their offers. There is, however, a categorization into types of offers within each main activity area (accommodation, food serving, and experience), and

there are criteria for becoming a member. The firm should have a basis in primary industries (agriculture, forestry or fisheries). This basis can take the form of localization of the tourist activity on or near a farm, or using resources from primary production as part of the offer. The firm must endorse the purpose and the value base of HANEN. Moreover, HANEN approves applicants for road sign number 650.40; “Traditional food/rural tourism”. The symbol in this sign is the HANEN rooster in silhouette.¹³ Non-members with an activity related to primary production can also apply for this sign.

3.3.6. Cultural-cognitive factors

3.3.6.1. Common understanding. Among the members in HANEN, there is a certain extent of common understanding of what farm tourism is. However, the products (such as accommodation, food serving and experiences) that members offer vary. It seems that there are common understandings within subgroups, such as those who identify as ‘visiting farms’, ‘party organizers’ and ‘organizers of courses and conferences’ for example. In addition, there seems to be differences in understanding between those accommodation farms that mostly have ‘drop in’ tourists and those that rely on advance bookings. There is also a rising recognition and appreciation of farm tourism among external agents, such as tour operators and tourist associations regionally and nationally.

3.3.6.2. Signs and symbols. Since 2009, a drawing of a rooster with the name HANEN at the bottom is the logo for farm tourism and traditional food in Norway (see Fig. 4 below). It is also the name and symbol of the branch organization itself. Before 2009, a logo with the same rooster on an arrow (a weathercock) with the name “Gardsmat” (farm food) at the bottom was used exclusively for farm food. The new symbol covers both food and tourism. The rooster was chosen to represent the abovementioned values of HANEN and symbolizes quality and pride (HANEN, 2009b).

4. Discussion

4.1. Comparison

In Table 2 the key characteristics of the three cases described in Section 3 are placed side by side. The first column characterizes the product, the next two columns refer to organizational features, while institutional characteristics are shown in the three columns to the right. As this table shows, the cases contrast on certain features and are similar on others. Moreover, there is no overarching system underpinning differences or similarities.

The range of *products* offered in farm tourism differs considerably between the three cases. Farm tourism in South Tyrol reflects a rather broad conception of the product, although not as broad as in Norway. Direct selling of food, food serving and accommodation are equally important and are combined on a number of farms. In the North Tyrolean context the farm tourism product is conceived rather narrowly and always connected to accommodation. This reflects the legal situation at the time when farm holidays started in Austria. At that time, the food system was very centralized with little room for local sales. However, the Holiday on Farm enterprises were among the first to incorporate direct sales and farm products as part of their offer. As the founder of UaB in North Tyrol states: “Farm products have always been considered one of the strongholds of holidays on farm.”

¹³ An important reason why a rooster was chosen, according to an informant in HANEN, is that the Road Administration pointed out that this was a symbol used in many European countries to identify farm tourism and farm food offers.



Fig. 4. HANEN – symbol of rural tourism and traditional food in Norway.

Norway has a broad spectrum of products. Most of the products have a connection to farming or farms. However, where they have few links to farming, they are clearly based on rural resources. There is no general tendency that one type of product (e.g. accommodation) dominates over others (for example, food serving). In South Tyrol, one specific law for farms regulates all accommodation, direct sales of food and provision of meals. Therefore, although geographically neighboring and in close contact, the type of products offered in the two Alpine cases differs. In Norway by contrast, experiences and activities have a more prominent role in the product range.

The *organization* of farm tourism in the three cases has clear contrasts, and certain similarities. The organizational structure is different in all three cases, while the goals are strikingly similar. North Tyrol and Norway are similar in the sense that there are specific organizations for farm tourism, the membership is voluntary, and the organizations are formally independent of other organizations and authorities. In North Tyrol there is significant co-operation between the farm tourism organization and the Chamber of Agriculture at the provincial level. In Norway, links at the national level between the farm tourism organization and the Farmers' Union are strong. In South Tyrol the organization for farm tourism is not even a separate organization, but a department of the Farmers' Union. Membership is mandated by law, which means that the bonds to authorities (in this case, regional) are strong. Bonds on the national level, both toward agricultural organizations and authorities, are weak or absent, due to the special political and ethnic situation. This contrasts especially with the organizational setup in Norway.

The number and importance of levels in the farm tourism organization also vary. In North Tyrol there are many levels, and the national level, the regional (province) level and even the district level are all important in the organizational structure and carry out specific tasks. Furthermore, the connections between agricultural and tourism organizations differ. In South Tyrol the regional level is the central level while the national level has a marginal role. In Norway there are both national and regional levels, but the regional level is rather weak with few resources. Connections between the tourism sector and the agricultural sector appear to be closest in North Tyrol, less intimate in Norway and almost absent in South Tyrol.

In terms of types of members, the dividing lines are different. Here North Tyrol and South Tyrol are similar in the sense that only active farms are members in the organization, thus leading to a rather homogenous organization. By contrast, in the organization in Norway, rural entrepreneurs as well as farmers are members, although farmers are the majority. Moreover, the farmers are not necessarily active farmers. This creates a more heterogeneous organization, which parallels the wide range of products.

The goals of the organizations are generally similar. In all three locations marketing, quality assurance and competence building make up the three major tasks of the organizations. In North Tyrol, price setting constitutes a fourth task, while this task is minor or absent in the other two cases. Even if the goals are much the same, the ways in which the organizations go about achieving them differ. The methods of securing quality are quite different in the two Alpine regions compared to Norway. The marketing methods on the other hand are quite similar. For example, in all three cases the organizations use internet web pages to provide information about different offers and producers. However, the web pages seem somewhat more advanced in the Alpine cases. In North Tyrol more emphasis is put on competence building activities and members learning to use information- and communication technology (ICT).

Farm tourism is *institutionalized* differently in the three locations, even if there are some similarities when it comes to criteria and use of signs. The legal base differs insofar that in South Tyrol a specific law regulates the farm tourism sector, while there is no such specific law in North Tyrol or Norway. In South Tyrol there are strong legal prescriptions governing the scope of activities. The law governs not only accommodation, but also farm restaurants and the organization of leisure activities. In North Tyrol and in Norway, no direct regulations for farm tourism are in place, but there are some general regulations affecting the sector. In North Tyrol farms are legally placed within the same regulation as private bed & breakfasts, which indicates again the strong focus on providing accommodation.

The normative forces standardizing farm tourism are most prominent in the forms of categorization and certification. Here,

Table 2
Comparison of farm tourism in North Tyrol, South Tyrol and Norway.

	Product range	Organizational structure	Goals	Legal base	Certification	Sign/brand name
North Tyrol	Narrow range, narrow concept (only accommodation and related services)	Formally independent, very close ties to farmers' union Both national and regional (provincial) levels are important	Marketing Quality Competence Price setting	Legal base for bed & breakfast, beyond that no direct regulation	Precise formal qualitative assessment, categorization with flowers	Weak logo, strong brand name
South Tyrol	Wide range included in one association, narrow concept of tourism	Dependent – a department of farmers' union Regional level most important	Marketing Quality Competence	Specific law for farm tourism products and services	Precise, formal qualitative assessment, categorization with flowers	Strong logo (roter Hahn), strong brand name
Norway	Wide range included in one association, broad concept of tourism	Independent. National level most important Ties with farmers' union	Marketing Quality Competence	No direct regulation	Some criteria, low degree of formalization, no categorization	Strong logo (HANEN), weak brand name

the two Alpine cases are similar, while Norway is different. The two Alpine cases have very similar criteria systems for categorization. A system was first developed and introduced in Austria and later adopted in South Tyrol. In North Tyrol, the approach is to form a peer group of professional farm tourism operators who shape the sector. However, this was not the case in the beginning. The founder of the organization, the former head of the department of home economics at the regional chamber of agriculture recalls that:

... in the beginning it was an open group which took in farmers to professionalize them for the UaB business, farmers who would later leave the group again out of various reasons, but continued offering holidays on their farm... It was viewed positively if someone left... This changed later when the farmers wanted to build a strong group.

The present president says: “The group of UaB farms is now a very close group which has a common understanding.” Resembling the agricultural advisory system, and in addition to categorization, emphasis is placed on education and advice. A common image is created on the basis of less prescriptive cognitive factors. For instance, the presence of farm animals and a traditional farm operation is essential for membership. And while categorization allows a certain amount of standardization, recently this has been reduced to make room for more individual adaptations. Thus, by assembling the most professional operators of farm holidays, the association has succeeded in creating a collective image of farm tourism and standards. This means that tourists can relate to farm tourism as such, and not rely solely on single farms, much like a hotel chain. While the Norwegian organization may have similar aspirations, there the level of standardization is lowest owing to the fact that there is no certification and quality grading (of the products). Further, the range of products is varied and much broader. This situation may also be due to fewer organizational resources. A quality system like that in the Alpine cases requires organizational resources and personnel. This is an example of dependency between organization and institutionalization.

Concerning signs and symbols, South Tyrol and Norway are rather similar, while North Tyrol stands out. One important cognitive factor for a unified appearance of an organization is its

brand and logo. In South Tyrol, the collective label of the “red rooster” is very well known and embraces not only farm tourism, but also direct marketing of food. This is similar to the Norwegian case which also uses the symbol of a rooster. In North Tyrol, the label of a stylized farm building is used throughout the whole of Austria. This type of logo has a weaker identity-building effect on the providers of farm holidays. More important is the brand name “Holiday at the Farm”, which is strongly associated with the organization.

When we put the elements together, we obtain a picture of three different blends of farm tourism. We avoid the term *type* to describe farm tourism here as the cases overlap in many respects. Regarding the product, the basic difference between North Tyrol on the one hand, and Norway and South Tyrol on the other, is that while in the former, the scope is restricted to farms with a strong focus on accommodation, the scope of activities in Norway and to some extent South Tyrol is broader. The logos mirror these differences. The rooster, common to South Tyrol and Norway is a general symbol of rurality and signals farm offers and hence, can be applied to a range of rural and farm products. The picture of a farmstead in the Austrian case refers more specifically to farm accommodation. The more heterogeneous organization and product range in Norway can be explained by the smaller tourist market there and hence less resources available for organization.

4.2. A model

The analysis demonstrates the importance of products, organization and institutional arrangements in the farm tourism sector. Moreover, the analysis shows that there is interdependence in various ways between these factors. This interplay contributes to the specific “blend” of the farm tourism sector we observe in the different locations. Further studies of other locations may show the degree to which such a claim is justified. Such research might benefit from a model like that presented in Fig. 5. This model builds on findings in this study supplemented with observations made in other studies. An overview of the data sources used to construct each factor is presented in Table 3.

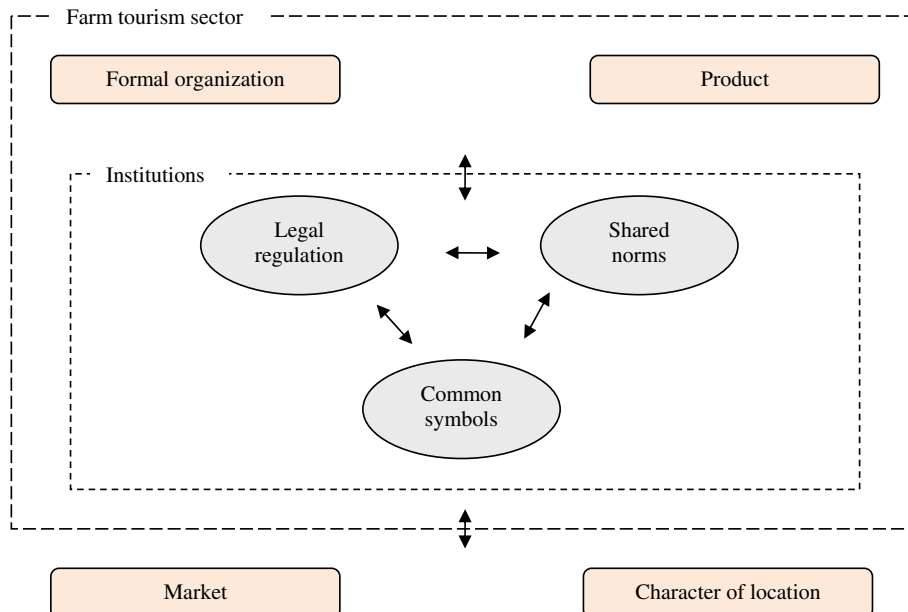


Fig. 5. The farm tourism sector, institutions and external factors.

Table 3
Empirical data for the different factors in the model of the farm tourism sector.

	Interviews	Documents	Participant observation ^a
Legal regulation	X	X	X
Shared norms	X	X	
Common symbols		X	
Formal organization	X	X	X
Product	X	X	X
Market	X ^b	X	
Character of location	X ^b	X	

^a Concerns South Tyrol only.

^b Concerns North Tyrol only.

Except for the elements ‘market’ and ‘character of location’, the model is an outcome of the analysis of the cases presented above. An institutionalized farm tourism sector means that institutions have developed in some key areas. We propose grouping factors of institutionalization into three broad categories: legal regulation, shared norms and common symbols. These are placed within the frame called ‘institutions’. As the analysis has shown, there is interdependency between the different kinds of institutions. This is symbolized through double arrows. Moreover, a farm tourism sector can be *more or less* institutionalized. This depends on the volume, intensity and complexity of institutions. The discussion to date has painted a picture of institutionalized farm tourism sectors, but the *weight* of various types of institutions varies and the *concrete design* of instruments differs from case to case.

The analysis has also clearly shown that the institutions of a farm tourism sector have mutual relationships to formal organizations and products from farm tourism. These relationships can be rather specific and varied, and in the model, they are symbolized by one double arrow. The inclusion of organization and product extends the understanding of the role of institutions as part of the farm tourism sector. More specifically, we claim that institutions in farm tourism cannot persist without some formal organization. Likewise, products are an important part of the farm tourism sector and affected by institutional arrangements. The clearest example in this study, and found in all three cases is the “trinity” between institutions, the product and formal organization in the area of quality criteria. Together the three cases provide examples of different combinations of institutional elements and various links to products and organization in the farm tourism sector.

While the different combinations of institutions can explain some differences between the farm tourism sectors in the cases presented, the empirical data in the study, together with observations in other studies, provides some indications, although not exhaustive, of the role of external factors. The indications can be sorted in two categories: one is *market*, the other is *character of location*. These categories are placed at the bottom of the figure, outside the “farm tourism sector”, but interacting with the sector (symbolized with the double arrow).

Concerning markets (visitors to farm tourism and their spending)¹⁴, we find in Section 3 indications of significant differences between the locations. Austria is considered the leading country in Europe when it comes to farm tourism (Embacher, 1994; Nilsson, 2002). Within Austria, North Tyrol is a province with many visitors for farm tourism. South Tyrol also has many visitors for farm tourism, while Norway has significantly less. A reason for this difference is that the two alpine cases are situated close to large

concentrations of people with spending power, and to a large extent, a similar culture, while Norway is more distant from large population concentrations. A large market will imply more sales in the farm tourism sector, which, again, will affect various parts of the sector, for example, the amount of resources available for organizations and product development. The nature of the market may also affect the need and interest to develop institutions to regulate, for example products, but how this effect works may not be obvious. The importance of markets for the farm tourism sector is also recognized in other studies (Cawley, Gaffey, & Gillmor, 2002; Sharpley & Vass, 2006).

Not all rural areas are equally attractive to tourists (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). Moreover, Cawley et al. (2002) show that connection between ‘localization’ and local organization is important in developing rural tourism. Like them, we define location as place related factors influencing the place’s attractiveness and suitability for farm tourism. Factors include culture, business structure, social relationships, physical features like nature, climate, and landscape and proximity to infrastructure. Many of these factors can even be regarded as part of the tourism product (cf. Smith, 1994). The relevant delimitation of place will vary according to the actual situation or problem. Sometimes territorial borders are not the most relevant (Cawley et al., 2002). Moreover, in some situations the relevant place can be a local community, in other situations larger locations like regions or nations may be meaningful units.

Many examples of links between qualities of the place and the farm tourism sector can be found in our empirical material. For example, the case descriptions reveal that the Alpine regions have 4–5 times as many guest nights in tourism than Norway. This bears witness to huge differences in business structure between the locations. This difference affects the conditions for farm tourism in the locations, by affecting the whole tourism industry and its marketing, competence and deliveries, and through influencing the number of potential customers. These observations can be supplemented by the account of the founder of farm holidays in North Tyrol: “*Closeness to centers, traffic conditions and the general touristic infrastructure played an important role*”. On the other hand the present CEO in North Tyrol states that: “... *in highly developed tourism destinations like Sölden in the Ötztal it is not necessary for farmers to be members of Urlaub am Bauernhof, they get their guests anyway*.” This indicates that proximity to a large market may sometimes affect the organization of the farm tourism sector by a decreased tendency to join formal organizations.

The empirical findings presented, paired with observations from other studies reveal that market and character of location are important dimensions (together with the other elements) in a model of the farm tourism sector. Use of the model in subsequent studies could shed light on the farm tourism sector in various locations – especially the influence of market and location on the farm tourism sector – while at the same time further refining the model.

4.3. Management implications

The findings of this study have potential implications for development and various actors and agencies in or related to the farm tourism sector. Among these are quality assurance providers, destination marketing agencies, development agencies, and industry partnerships between agriculture and tourism.

The study has showed that *product quality* is an important issue and that farm tourism organizations are central actors in providing quality assurance. However, the approach to quality and quality assurance differs between the cases. A message for management then is that decisions on quality strategies require a broader perspective than simply quality assurance. Such strategies and

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, the term ‘market’ refers to the *meeting place* between buyers and sellers (Swedberg, 1994). Here we make a simplification and refer to market as the demand for farm tourism products.

appropriate instruments must be considered in relation to the actual product range, organizational resources, and the size and type of the market. Nevertheless, despite differences in these factors there may still be elements that, with some adaptations, can be transferred and implemented across cases. However, if the range of products is very wide and organizational resources modest, as we have shown is the case for Norway, a very detailed quality scheme appears inappropriate and unrealistic. Some form of grading could still be possible. In this study we observe the use of grading in the context of a large market, a well defined product range and considerable organizational resources (North Tyrol and South Tyrol), and the absence of grading in the contrasting context of Norway. A managerial question then becomes: how would it eventually be possible to implement grading in contexts that mirror the latter case? Under any circumstances, the flower system in Austria and South Tyrol provides an interesting example and may lead to the development of variants in other locations.

For *destination marketing agencies* like regional tourist boards and local authorities, one implication of the study concerns organization in the farm tourism sector. This study demonstrates that this organization differs in structure between locations. For example in Norway, the local organizational level is almost absent, and local authorities or tourist boards must co-operate with local farmers or collaborate with farm tourism organizations above the local level, if they want to have connections with the farm tourism sector. This may not be a problem if numbers of participating farms are low, but requires a different approach for such agencies to co-operate with the farm tourism sector compared to, for example, North Tyrol where farm tourism organizations operate at both the provincial and regional level. Another implication of the study for destination agencies is that the study may increase the awareness of variations in product range in farm tourism. Farm tourism products have a potential role to play in the total tourism product of a destination, but these products must fit with the other tourism products of the destination. This study may help to increase the knowledge among destination agencies concerning how the farm tourism sector defines and markets its products.

Findings in this study also have implications for *actors and agencies involved in tourism development*. There is a diversity of such actors and agencies, some of which also perform advisory services and marketing, as is the case for farm tourism (member) organizations. State agencies (like Innovation Norway) and regional tourism boards also work to develop tourism, including to greater or lesser extents, farm tourism. It is therefore difficult to give a general description of the implications for such actors and agencies. The priority and allocation of resources between different task areas is also a topic that concerns farm tourism organizations. For example, such organizations could consider if the present use of resources between day-to-day operations and development work within the three major areas marketing, quality assurance and competence building is the best one. Could a change in resource allocation between these task areas lead to better development of the sector in the actual location? Another highly relevant aspect for both development agencies and researchers, concerns products. We have discussed this issue extensively earlier in this paper. A basic question when it comes to product development is whether the product portfolio in the farm tourism sector should be clearly categorized (“streamlined”) by the central organization (as in the two Tyrolean cases) or if the range of products should be the outcome of individual processes on the farms (as in Norway).

Actors involved in *industry partnerships between agriculture and tourism* may also benefit from this study, however on a more general level since investigating such partnerships was not an object of the study. We know from experiences in Norway that hotels co-operate with local farmers who serve local food on the

farm to hotel guests. Another example is tour operators who co-operate with HANEN (the member organization for farm tourism in Norway) to identify actual farms to visit on various routes. This study may give hotels, tour operators and other tourism actors a clearer idea of products that farm tourism offers (or could offer) and how this sector is organized.

Using the three empirical cases in the study as illustrations of real management situations, our analysis suggests that each of the cases could potentially benefit from the others when it comes to organization. Thus, an “optimum” organization could:

- act on a voluntary basis with a strong professional orientation, strict quality assurance and price setting (as in North Tyrol);
- include not only farmers but also various rural entrepreneurs (as in Norway), in order to broaden the range of products and services offered and to better comply with territorial rural development aspirations;
- produce a strong common logo for a variety of rural products and services (as in South Tyrol).

4.4. Conclusions

This paper has set out to describe the product range, goals and structure of collective organizations, and institutional solutions in farm tourism. We have also been interested in illuminating connections between these factors and management implications. The empirical platform has been descriptions of farm tourism in three selected locations in Europe: North Tyrol, South Tyrol, and Norway. The breadth and variety of the product range differs, from North Tyrol where the product is centered on accommodation, to Norway where the product range is broader and more varied and where the member base of the organization is also more heterogeneous. We find clear contrasts between the three cases when it comes to the structure of the organizations. The goals of the organizations are by and large identical for all three cases focusing on three task areas: marketing, competence building and quality assurance. Concerning institutions in two of the three cases, quality systems are the same while the third case (Norway) has a different (less strict) system. Similarly, the signs used to symbolize farm tourism are the same in two of the locations, while it is different in the third (North Tyrol). Hence, differences and similarities go in all directions, so there is no clear and unified way in which the farm tourism sector has developed and currently operates in different locations. We suggest that explanations of the differences can be sought in two broad groups of factors. One is market and the other is characteristics of the location, which among other things include socio-cultural features and nature. For example, the higher share of tourism among farms in North Tyrol than in Norway can be attributed to a larger and more proximate market. The findings have implications for various actors and agencies related to farm tourism: quality assurance providers, destination marketing agencies, development agencies, and industry partnerships between agriculture and tourism.

This study illustrates that while regulative prescriptions are the basis for standardization from the top down, the common cognitive factors within the organization can serve as stepping stones for creativity and variety from the bottom up. Standardization and creativity need, however, to be kept in a delicate balance. Individual differentiation meets the expectation of uniqueness and authenticity and hence a farm tourism sector that meets heterogeneous needs in the tourist market. Using the terms of Smith (1994), the common core of farm tourism is landscape and farm experience, but this can be enhanced differently depending on characteristics of the location and demands in the actual market. These

enhancements, for example accommodation and food serving, may be regulated by law or codified by certification, that is, some sort of standardization. The other two categories mentioned by Smith (freedom of choice and the possibility of involvement) constitute areas of individual differentiation, which can be offered through experiences with the farm or farming as a basis.

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