

THE ROLE OF URBAN TOURISTS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS: A LEBANESE CASE STUDY

M. OWAYGEN

*University of Balamand, PO.box: 100 Tripoli/Lebanon
Email: owaygen@hotmail.com*

Abstract

The massive movements from the rural to the urban areas are the result of both the “push” factors arising from rural poverty, as well as the “pull” factors based on expectations of higher incomes, employment and services in the urban areas. Rural development is about improving the life chances and well-being of individuals and households, particularly the mass of rural poor who have been left behind in the process of economic growth. These individuals and households depend quite directly on non-marketed common property resources for their livelihood. This is obviously true for marginalized societies. An important element of the current search for sustainable development is the protection of natural habitats and biological diversity. Protected areas are of central importance in this context. There is an increasing recognition that environmental protection must include economic considerations that both influence the political support for government programs and change the economic incentives for resource exploitation.

One manifestation of this perspective is the recent interest in ecotourism as a mean to promote sustainable development, while, at the same time, creating an economic justification for the preservation of natural resources. In mountain areas, as can be found in Lebanon, nature is very sensitive and the overuse of resources such as woodlands, leads to ecological imbalances and to low economic sustainability. Such is the prevailing situation in the Mountain Region of Akkar in Northern Lebanon and in the Mountain Region of Baalbek in the Anti-Lebanon Range. This paper aims to investigate the impacts of urban tourists on rural areas through their visits of natural reserves. It analyses the socio-economic features of farming families responsible for resource degradation and intends to provide basic information on an existing model concerning a specific kind of use of natural resources. Four study areas have been selected: The Shouf Cedar Reserve, the Cedar Protected Area, the Mountain Region of Baalbek and the Mountain Region of Akkar.

It was revealed that tourism in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area is characterized by relatively high income tourists coming mostly from the capital Beirut and other urban coastal areas. The financial capacity of tourists and their interest in close-to-nature tourism present a good potential for a future implementation of nature-based concepts and related rural development in the Mountain Region of Akkar and in the Mountain Region of Baalbek. It was also found that those who are responsible for natural resource problems, namely overgrazing, behave correctly according to their own economic interest. Without this inadequate activity the concerned families would have serious socio-economic difficulties. The creation of national parks in the Mountain Region of Baalbek and in the Mountain Region of Akkar is expected to induce a rural agricultural development. Urban tourists will play, through their expenditures, a key role in this development.

Employment opportunities resulting from the creation of national parks should be offered, as first priority, to livestock keeping families in order to compensate their loss associated with

the protection of woodlands and in order to maintain their living standard at least at the same level as before protection.

1. Theoretical background

The massive movements from the rural to the urban areas are the result of both the “push” factors arising from rural poverty, as well as the “pull” factors based on expectations of higher incomes, employment and services in the urban areas (FAO, 1988). Rural development is about improving the life chances and well-being of individuals and households, particularly the mass of rural poor who have been left behind in the process of economic growth. These individuals and households depend quite directly on non-marketed common property resources for their livelihood. This is obviously true for marginalized societies (Shepherd, 1998). The notion of diversity and equity as the basis for economic growth recognizes that increasing the number and variety of income sources can help rural residents to guide economic growth in balance with environmental objectives (Sargent, 1991). The diversification of income sources in the rural area economy is desirable, since it multiplies the economic choices available to people and makes the area economy more resilient (Bendavid, 1998).

The growing recognition that different forms of rural experience (in terms of leisure, recreation, housing, employment and heritage seeking) are desired attributes of an “urban” existence and of culture means that rural areas now attract different exploitative interests aiming to serve these growing markets. As the primacy of agricultural production (as food production) diminishes, new consumption-oriented roles of rural areas, such as recreation, leisure and environmental conservation are growing in prominence. In terms of consumption, especially among those large and influential sections of affluent societies that now place a high priority on non-material and positional goods as well as the accumulation of assets, rural space provides many sought after opportunities, such as for living space, recreation, the enjoyment of amenity and wildlife, and a wholesome and pleasant environment (Marsden, 1993).

An important element of the current search for sustainable development is the protection of natural habitats and biological diversity. Protected areas are of central importance in this context (Munasinghe, 1994). There is an increasing recognition that environmental protection must include economic considerations that both influence the political support for government programs and change the economic incentives for resource exploitation. One manifestation of this perspective is the recent interest in ecotourism as a mean to promote sustainable development, while, at the same time, creating an economic justification for the preservation of natural resources (Alderman, 1994).

This type of tourism, defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”, tends to have a low impact on the environment and requires fewer infrastructures. By the early 1990s, nearly every nonindustrialized country was promoting ecotourism as part of its development strategy (Honey, 1999).

There is already significant alienation between the urban and rural sectors of many less developed countries regarding the importance of protected areas and the ability to participate in domestic tourism pursuits. For local rural communities, protected areas are often perceived as an alien concept, which deny them access to necessary resources. Unless these local residents can obtain some kind of compensatory benefit from the protected areas, their attitudes will continue to be hostile and their attempts to gain access to the resources will undermine the viability of park systems (Weaver, 1998). What are needed are practical

examples of the benefits of conservation, as a mean of persuading people to forego the immediate attractions of exploiting resources unsustainably (Walkey, 1999).

The supply of rural places that would like to attract economic activity far exceeds the demand for such places. Exogenous forces that will improve the prospects for some rural areas include an increase in the number of people of retirement age and with a retirement income as well as growth of outdoor recreation and tourism activities. Rural space needs to be managed to provide for a changing, urban, and internationally driven economy. An attractive and environmentally healthy countryside will be an economic asset for the future of both rural and urban areas (Gahr, 1993). Based on the American experience in this context, tourism looks like the ideal development strategy for rural America. It was a source of startling employment growth in many rural counties during the 1970s and 1980s. It tends to be recession-proof. It does not pollute. In theory, it can be tried anywhere (Galston, 1995). Projects and programs intended to promote sustainable rural development should be judged by their impacts on the livelihoods of vulnerable rural groups as well as on the environment. If the livelihoods of all the vulnerable groups in a rural region are not protected or improved, the initiative can easily be counterproductive. If pastoralists, for example, have access to inadequate land resources for bare survival, they may be forced to overexploit their lands unless they have some other sources of income (UNRISD report, 1997).

Farming systems research is aimed at identifying options for improving the well-being of rural households in specific local environments. It is based on a recognition that rural change and development ultimately depend on rural people whose existing practices are well adapted to environmental constraints and household objectives. Attempts to develop and impose innovations or policies from the top down, without previous reference to those who will be affected, rarely succeed (Upton, 1996).

In mountain areas, as can be found in Lebanon, nature is very sensitive and the overuse of resources such as woodlands, leads to ecological imbalances and to low economic sustainability. Such is the prevailing situation in the Mountain Region of Akkar in Northern Lebanon and in the Mountain Region of Baalbek in the Anti-Lebanon Range. In these regions, uncontrolled and excessive grazing of the native vegetation by goat and sheep inhibits the natural regeneration and propagation of the flora and prevents the seed production of endemic plants in their natural habitat. The two regions dispose of natural assets (specially woodlands and wild life) presenting an important potential for ecotourism activities.

2. Objectives and methodology:

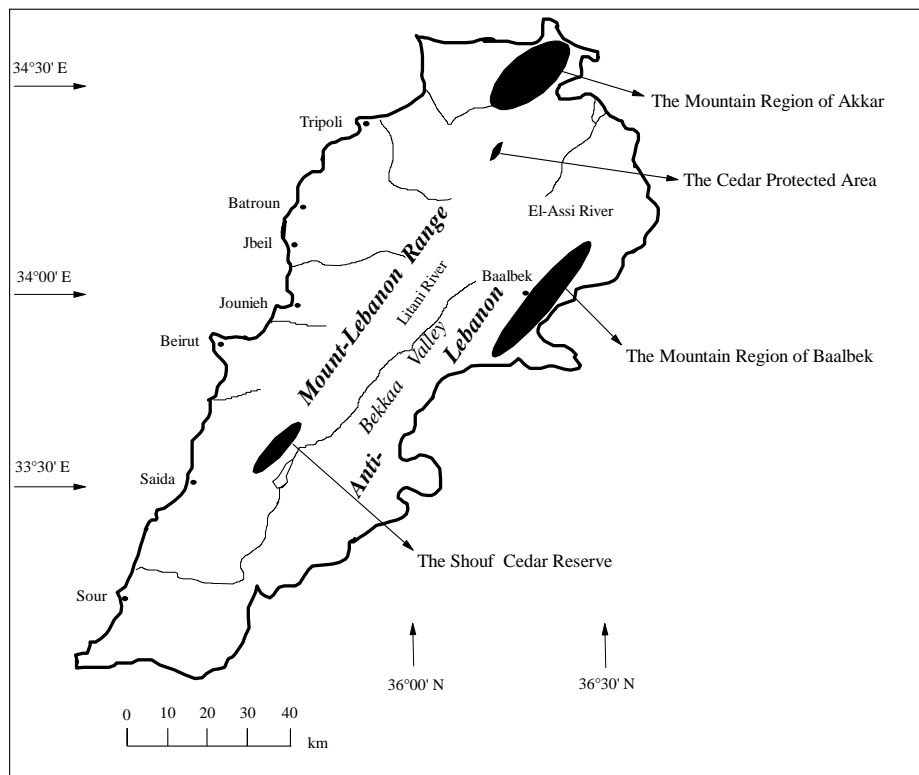
This study investigates the impacts of urban tourists on rural areas through their visits of natural reserves. It analyses the socio-economic features of farming families responsible for resource degradation and intends to provide basic information on an existing model concerning a specific kind of use of natural resources. Attitudes and opinions of interviewed tourists, their motivations and main interest concerning specific issues are of importance. Such information will help in the identification of an ecologically sound and economically viable concept for the sustainable use of natural resources in rural areas in relation to possibilities for soft ecotourism and the development of small farms. Four study areas have been selected (figure 1). Three are located in the Mount-Lebanon Range and one in the Anti-Lebanon Range. Mount-Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges are two parallel reliefs which made up the mountains of Lebanon; the latter forming its eastern boundary. The two ranges run parallel to the Mediterranean coast. Between them lies the rift valley of the Bekkaa.

- The Shouf Cedar Reserve: it is located in the southern part of the Mount-Lebanon Range and includes three Cedar forests. One of them, the Maaser al Shouf forest (6 hectares), has been selected for this study.

- The Cedar Protected Area: it is a small grove of around 10 ha of cedar trees (*Cedrus libani*) located in the northern part of the Mount-Lebanon Range.
- The Mountain Region of Akkar: it is situated in the district of Akkar lying in the extreme north of the country.
- The Mountain Region of Baalbek: it is located in the northern eastern part of the Anti-Lebanon Range.

A survey (standardized questionnaires), constituting the core information of this study, was carried out. This survey can be differentiated into two types: a tourism survey and a farm-family-household survey. The first was conducted in the Shouf Cedar Reserve as well as in the Cedar Protected Area, while the second was carried out in the Mountain Region of Akkar and the Mountain Region of Baalbek.

Figure 1: Map of Lebanon showing the four study areas



Tourist survey

The survey covered 160 domestic tourists (Lebanese) selected randomly in the Shouf Cedar Reserve between 15 August and 15 September 2001. Another survey was carried out in the Cedar Protected Areas between August and September 1996 and covered 96 domestic tourists.

Farm-family-household survey

Stratified random sampling was used to define different strata of farming families. In this study, focus will be on the families practicing goat and sheep keeping. The farming system approach has been used. It is an approach which can be applied in farming, farming related or rural development projects, programs and strategies. It provides the philosophy, the concept and the strategy for developing and introducing solutions to problems at the farm-household

and village level (Doppler, 1993). The farming system with livestock production has been defined. In this system, 30 farming families were randomly selected in 2001 in the Mountain Region of Baalbek and 26 families have been surveyed in 1996 in the Mountain Region of Akkar. The survey in the Mountain Region of Baalbek was carried out by the team of a UNDP/GEF project on: “Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agrobiodiversity in the Near East”(1).

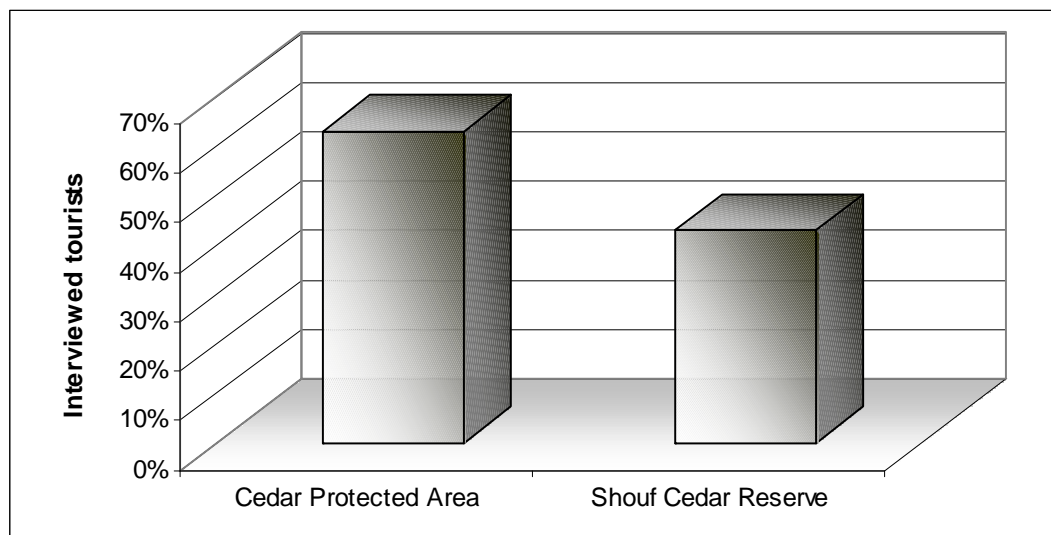
3. Results

3.1 Tourism analysis in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area

In this section, the on-going tourism in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area will be analyzed, based on the tourist survey carried out in these two study areas. The socio-economic impacts of tourists on the local rural community will be highlighted. Attitudes and opinions of interviewed tourists, their motivations and main interest concerning specific issues are of importance. Around 30% and 60% of the interviewed tourists in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area respectively are coming from the capital Beirut (figure 2).

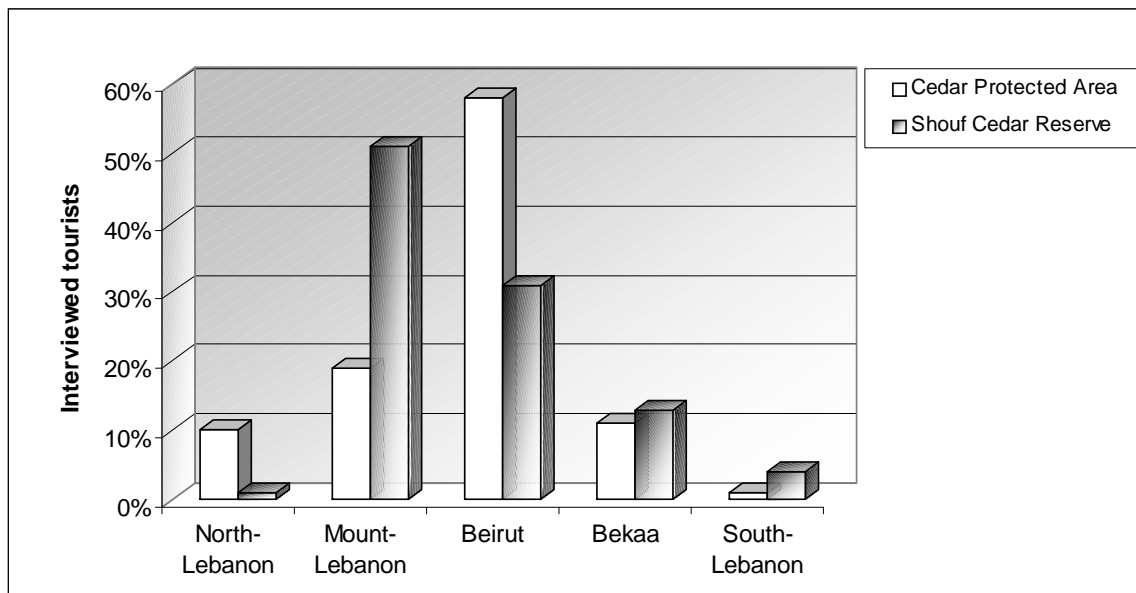
Tourists coming from urban areas located on the Mediterranean coast present more than 40% of the interviewed tourists in both study areas (figure 3). This reflects the importance of nature-based tourism in drawing urban people to rural areas in the country.

Figure 2: Provincial origin of interviewed tourists in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area



(1): The analysis of data collected from this survey was conducted by the author in his capacity as a recruited national expert in the project. The other surveys (tourist survey in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area as well as the farm-family-household survey in the Mountain Region of Akkar) were carried out personally by the author in his capacity as a researcher at the University of Hohenheim in Germany and later on at the University of Balamand in Lebanon.

Figure 3: Importance of urban tourists (in terms of percentage) visiting the Shouf Cedar Reserve and the Cedar Protected Area



More than two thirds of the interviewed tourists in both study areas took lunch in restaurants and more than one third of them bought local products and souvenirs made by local communities living nearby the reserves (figures 4 and 5). Restaurant and hotel owners are almost villagers living in the reserves zones. The sale of agricultural products presents a field of expenditures for 40% of the interviewed tourists. These products are sold directly by farmers to tourists at roadsides leading to the Cedar Protected Area (within a distance of 24 km from the protected area).

The distribution of the expenditure of tourists is shown in figures 6 and 7. This expenditure is calculated at US\$ 26 (average) per tourist per trip (1-3 days) in the zone located within a radius of 24 km from the Cedar Protected Area. In the case of the Shouf Cedar Reserve, an average expenditure of US\$ 14 per tourist per day was calculated. The amount of US\$ 26 per tourist reflects the relatively good financial situation of the Cedar Protected Area visitors taking into account that the majority of the interviewed persons come with their families, which makes the expenditure per family relatively high (US\$ 115 per family having an average of 4.42 persons). In the Shouf Cedar Reserve, around two thirds of the tourists coming from urban coastal areas have a monthly income which is more than US\$ 1500.

Figure 4: Different touristic sectors for expenditures of interviewed tourists in the Shouf Cedar Reserve

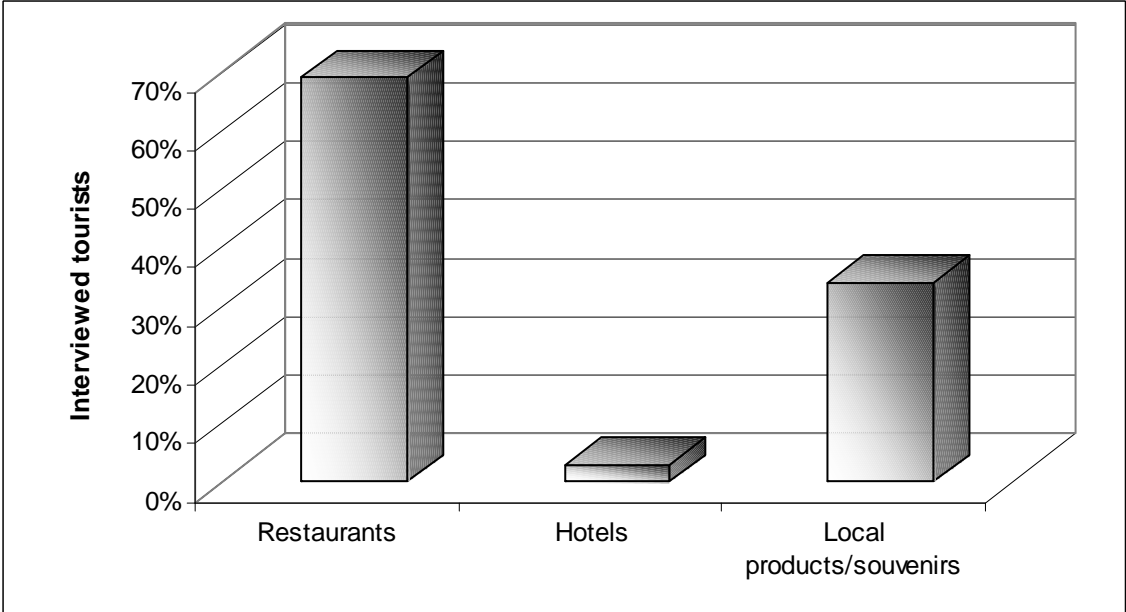


Figure 5: Different touristic sectors for expenditures of interviewed tourists in the Cedar Protected Area

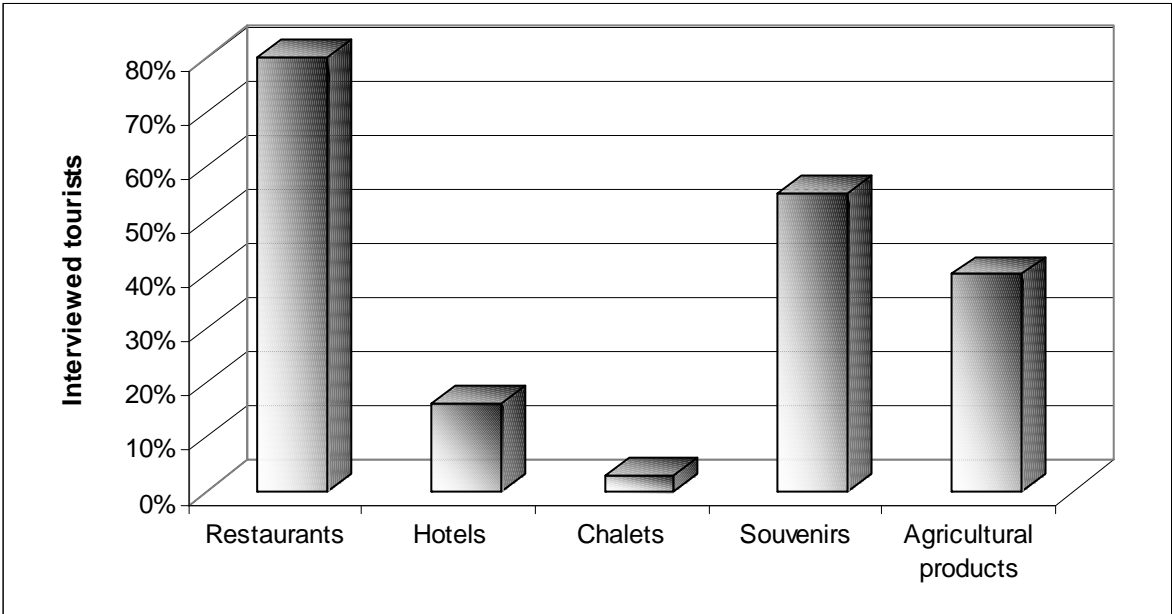


Figure 6: Distribution of tourists' expenditures in the Shouf Cedar Reserve

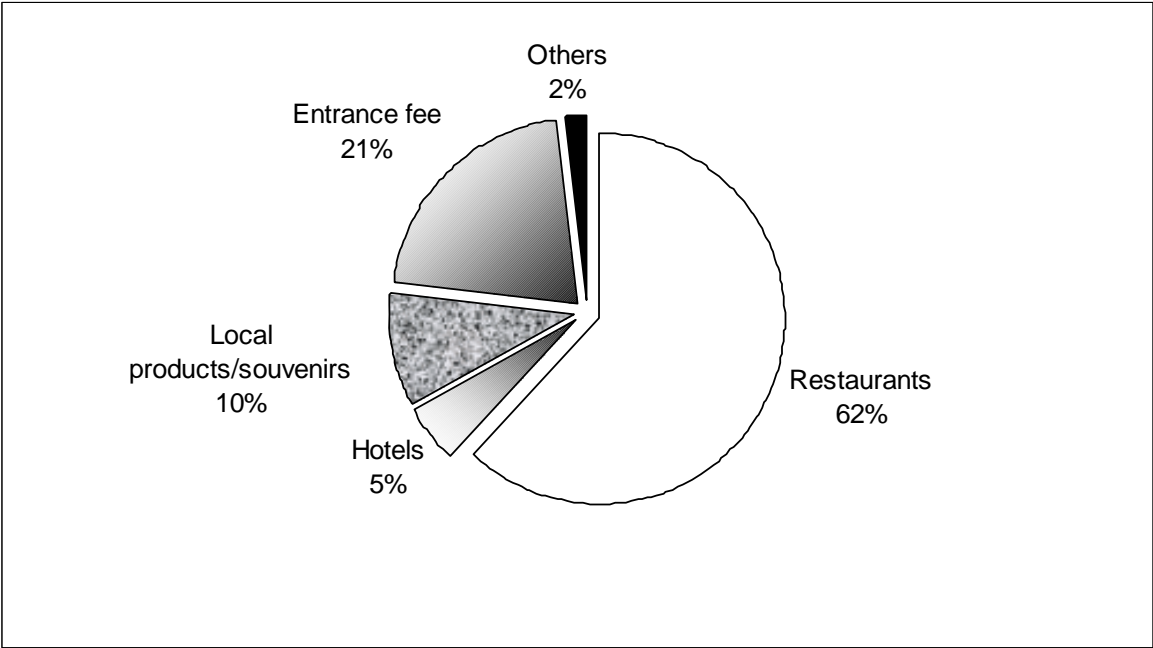
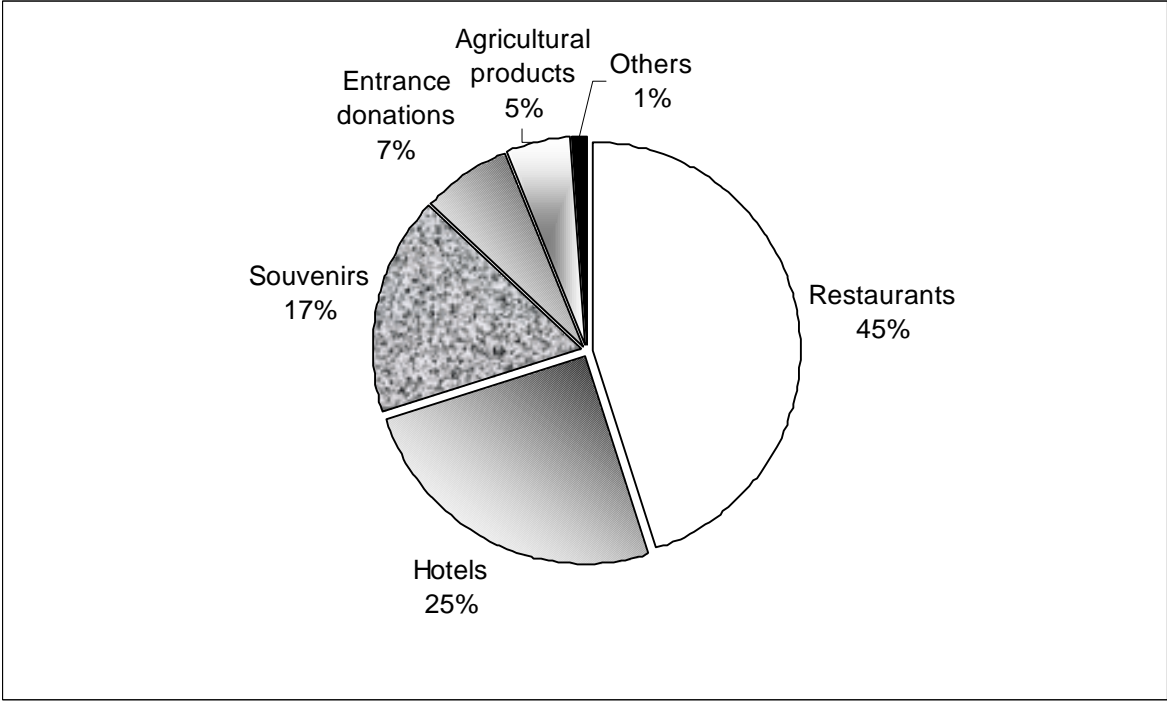


Figure 7: Distribution of tourists' expenditures in the Cedar Protected Area



The interviewed tourists in the Cedar Protected Area were asked about their willingness to visit natural protected areas in the Mountain Region of Akkar in the case that they existed and about their motive to visit the region. At least one reason was mentioned by the interviewed

person. The majority of the answers referred to the enjoyment of nature (table 1). This could be related to the fact that 63% of the interviewed persons come from urban areas. 10% of the tourists bluntly indicated that the reason for visiting protected areas in the Mountain Region of Akkar would be to get away from the city. One should mention that urban areas in Lebanon are relatively highly populated with very little green spaces. This creates a real need to visit natural sites.

The interviewed tourists in the Shouf Cedar Reserve were also asked about their interest in visiting protected areas in the Anti-Lebanon if the main attraction will be the enjoyment of wildlife. The majority of them (96%) were willing to visit these protected areas in case of their creation. All of them (except one case) were still willing to make their visits to the Anti-Lebanon protected areas if they would be asked to pay the same entrance fee they have paid to visit the Shouf Cedar Reserve.

Table 1: Motivations of the interviewed tourists in the Cedar Protected Area for their potential visits to protected areas in the Mountain Region of Akkar

<i>Motivations for visiting protected areas:</i>	<i>% of the interviewed tourists</i>
Enjoyment of nature	77
Discovery of a new area	46
Encouragement of the protection	7
Ecological education of children	4
The concept of protected areas	3
The way of life of rural communities	3
Scientific interest	2
Showing the protected areas to friends or to relatives visiting the country	2

Source: Owaygen, 1999

3.2 Farming System Analysis in the Mountain Regions of Akkar and of Baalbek

In the Mountain Region of Akkar, income resulting from goat keeping contributes to 77.21% of the farm income and to 61% of the total family income in the farming system with livestock production. This indicates a relatively high dependence of living standard of the families in this system on goat keeping. In the Mountain Region of Baalbek, it was found that the living standard of livestock keeping families is also highly dependent on goat and sheep production for the following reasons:

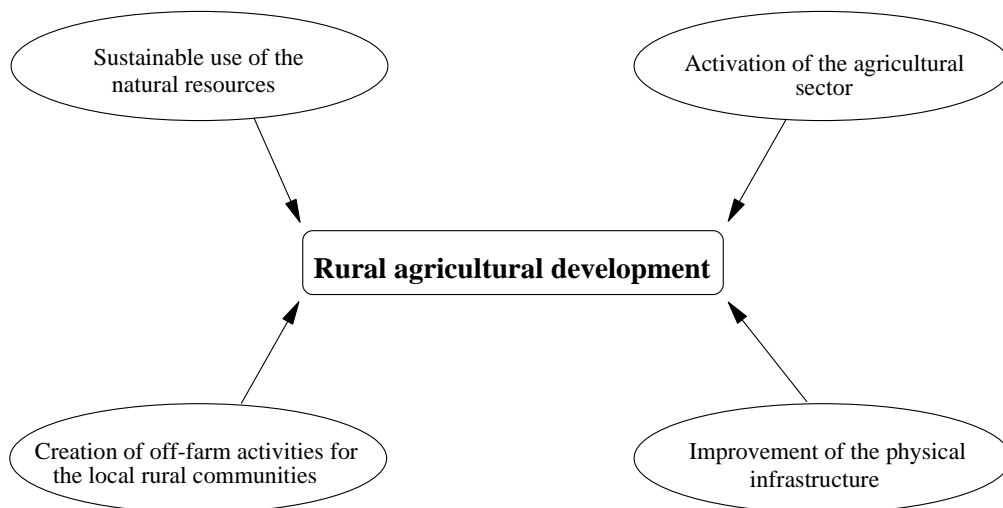
- The income from goat and sheep production represents around 80% of the family income.
- Livestock keeping contributes to the generation of more than one third (37%) of the total family cash income.
- Around two thirds of the family cash flow required mainly to cover the household expenses (payments for food, medicine, energy, water, clothing, education, etc.), is provided by goat and sheep production.

One can conclude that those who are responsible for natural resource problems, namely overgrazing, behave correctly according to their own economic interest. Without this inadequate activity (overgrazing), the concerned families would have serious socio-economic difficulties. In other words, any policy or concept which tends to conserve the natural resources in the Mountain Region of Akkar and in the Mountain Region of Baalbek (especially forests and woodlands), should offer alternatives to these groups of society.

Conclusion

The tourism in the Shouf Cedar Reserve and in the Cedar Protected Area is characterized by relatively high income tourists coming mostly from the capital Beirut and other urban coastal areas. These tourists are interested in a kind of close-to-nature tourism, in which the enjoyment of nature is of considerable importance. The financial capacity of tourists and their interest in close-to-nature tourism present a good potential for a future implementation of nature-based concepts and related rural development in the Mountain Region of Akkar and in the Mountain Region of Baalbek. The socio-economic impacts of tourists on the local community are revealed by the creation of new sources of off-farm income (mainly through employment) and by the activation of the agricultural sector through the creation of new markets for agricultural products aimed at the tourists visiting the natural reserves. The creation of national parks in the Mountain Region of Akkar and in the Mountain Region of Baalbek is expected to induce a rural agricultural development, based on four selected components of this kind of development (figure 8). This creation requires physical infrastructure and management. The physical infrastructure is supposed to be simple. Picnic and camping places, small hotels and simple restaurants are examples of this type of infrastructure. The creation of national parks would mean cease of grazing of the native vegetation or decrease of the grazing period. Therefore, employment opportunities resulting from this creation should be offered, as first priority, to the livestock keeping families in order to compensate their loss associated with the protection of woodlands and in order to maintain their living standard at least at the same level as before protection.

Figure 8: Components of rural agricultural development



References

ALDERMAN C.L. 1994. The Economics and the Role of Privately-Owned Lands Used for Nature Tourism, Education, and Conservation, edited by MUNASINGHE, M. and MCNEELY, J. In: *Protected Area Economics and Policy Linking Conservation and Sustainable Development*. World Bank: Washington, D.C.

BENDAVID A. 1998. *Rural Area Development Planning: Principles, Approaches and Tools of Economic Analysis*. FAO: Rome.

DOPPLER W. 1993. Definition and Concepts of Farming Systems, Agricultural Research and Development Toward Sustainable Production Systems, Technical paper prepared for NATURA/NECTAR Project.

FAO. 1988. *The Impact of Development Strategies on the Rural Poor: Second Analysis of Country Experiences in the Implementation of the WCARRD Programme of Action*. FAO: Rome.

GAHR W. 1993. *Rural America: Blueprint for Tomorrow*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

GALSTON W. 1995. *Rural Development in the United States: Connecting Theory, Practice, and Possibilities*. Island Press: Washington D.C.

HONEY M. 1999. *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development. Who Owns Paradise?* Island Press.

MARSDEN T. 1993. *Constructing the Countryside*. UCL Press: London.

MUNASINGHE M. 1994. Economic and Policy Issues in Natural Habitats and Protected Areas, edited by MUNASINGHE, M. and MCNEELY, J. In: *Protected Area Economics and Policy Linking Conservation and Sustainable Development*. World Bank: Washington, D.C.

OWAYGEN M. 1999. *Protecting Nature and Rural Agricultural Development: the Integration of Ecotourism in Northern Lebanon*. In: Doppler, W., (ed), *Farming Systems and Resource Economics in the Tropics*. Vol. 34 Wissenschaftsverlag Vauk Kiel KG.

OWAYGEN M. 2001. National Socio-Economic Report of a UNDP/GEF Project on: "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agrobiodiversity in the Near East".

SARGENT F. 1991. *Rural Environmental Planning for Sustainable Communities*. Island Press: Washington D.C.

SHEPHERD A. 1998. *Sustainable Rural Development*. Macmillan: Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire.

UNRISD Report. 1997. *Rural Development and the Environment: Towards Ecologically and Socially Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*. UNRISD: Geneva.

UPTON M. 1996. *The Economics of Tropical Farming Systems*. Cambridge University Press.

WALKEY M. 1999. *Integrated Protected Area Management*. Kluwer Academic Publishers: Boston.

WEAVER D. 1998. *Ecotourism in the Less Developed World*. CAB International.