



AGRITOURISM AS A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract:

Agritourism plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable development in rural areas by integrating tourism with agricultural practices. As a form of rural tourism, it not only contributes to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage but also promotes economic revitalization and social cohesion in communities often challenged by depopulation and economic stagnation. Sustainable practices within agritourism, such as organic farming, energy efficiency, and eco-friendly activities, further reinforce its potential as a strategic tool for rural development. This paper reviews existing literature on agritourism as a key strategy for sustainable rural development, focusing on its potential application in the Republic of Serbia. In addition, relevant statistical data from national databases are presented to illustrate the current state of agritourism in the country. The paper emphasizes the importance of effectively managing sustainable agritourism development and proposes key research questions for further exploration. These questions aim to enhance understanding of sustainable agritourism in the Republic of Serbia. By synthesizing existing findings, the paper also highlights the need for continued research in this field to support evidence-based policymaking and the design of effective rural development strategies.

Keywords:

sustainable development, rural tourism, rural areas, rural tourist households.

JEL Classification:

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become essential across various sectors, including tourism. The progress of the tourism industry is closely linked to all three aspects of sustainability, highlighting a holistic approach to balanced and responsible development (Streimikiene *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, sustainable development refers to the integration of environmental, social, and economic factors to conserve resources while simultaneously supporting the growth and resilience of local communities and economies (Bramwell & Lane, 2014).

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In a rural context, a substantial body of research suggests that contemporary sustainability goals can be effectively addressed by integrating rural and local resources into tourism development. However, a key obstacle in this process includes the regeneration of rural economies. Therefore, agritourism represents a vital strategy for maintaining rural areas, encompassing their economic, social, and cultural aspects (Adamov *et al.*, 2020).

Agritourism, which refers to tourism in rural areas with a focus on agricultural holdings and agricultural activities, presents a unique opportunity to integrate sustainability into the tourism offer (Leonte *et al.*, 2016). The synergy between agriculture, rural lifestyles, and tourism helps foster rural development. Agritourism serves as a means of balancing the needs of tourists with those of rural communities, offering economic and social benefits while minimizing negative environmental impacts (Ammirato *et al.*, 2020). As a result, many countries worldwide actively promote agritourism as part of their strategies for sustainable rural development (Adamov *et al.*, 2020).

In the Republic of Serbia, agritourism is still underdeveloped. According to data obtained from the E-Tourist platform, only 816 rural households are engaged in tourism-related activities. Empirical research shows that agritourism faces several challenges, including poor coordination between farmers and tourism organizations, a lack of business focus among farmers, and limited access to funding (Havale *et al.*, 2023; Palmi & Lezzi, 2020). Additionally, there is a challenge posed by policy gaps and the insufficient involvement of the academic community in developing clear plans for the future growth of this sector. Despite these challenges, interest in agritourism continues to grow, driven by increasing rural demand and the abundant resources available in the country's rural areas. With appropriate development and sustainable practices, Serbia holds significant potential to align its agritourism sector with global sustainability trends, thereby contributing meaningfully to the revitalization and long-term development of its rural regions.

This paper presents a review and analysis of the literature on rural tourism, with a particular emphasis on agritourism and its contribution to sustainable rural development. The aim of the paper is to explore the potential for agritourism development in the Republic of Serbia and emphasize the importance of managing its sustainable development. The majority of existing research on agritourism and sustainability centers on global trends, whereas the specific context of the Republic of Serbia and the Western Balkans remains insufficiently examined.

This study employs a structured research approach consisting of three main phases: the selection of relevant literature, the analysis and categorization of selected studies, and thematic synthesis. The process adheres to the guidelines of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology as outlined by Denyer & Tranfield (2009). To ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic, literature searches were conducted using major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords were used in both Serbian and English, reflecting the bilingual nature of the relevant literature. The key terms included sustainability, sustainable development, rural tourism, agritourism, agritourism offerings, and rural tourist households. A significant pool of approximately 300 research articles was identified. These were evaluated based on their relevance to the intersection of agritourism and sustainability. After this evaluation, we selected 60 studies for an in-depth review. The majority of the sources reviewed were published in recent years, highlighting the rising scholarly and practical attention directed toward this area of research. In addition to peer-reviewed literature, the paper incorporates data from strategic tourism documents of the Republic of Serbia, as well as data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and the E-Tourist platform.



The paper is structured into four main sections. The first section provides an overview of the literature on sustainable development in rural areas. The second section focuses on agritourism and its development in Serbia. The third section examines the role of agritourism in sustainable rural development, with particular emphasis on the importance of rural tourist households and the services they offer. The final section focuses on the management of sustainable agritourism development.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

Development driven by production and consumption beyond the population's actual needs has adverse impacts on the economy, society, and the environment. This realization gave rise to a new development paradigm – sustainable development (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2010). According to the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), sustainable development is defined as growth that operates within the environment's capacity, aiming to fulfill present human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Sustainable development encompasses three interrelated systems: the economic, social, and ecological systems (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2010; Jovičić, 2000). As such, it calls for the simultaneous pursuit of economic sustainability, social equity, and environmental quality.

In the context of rural areas in the Republic of Serbia, the concept of sustainable development has gained significant traction. Increasingly, rural tourism is being recognized as a key component in diversifying the rural economy (Cvijanović *et al.*, 2016). As Stojanović (2007) emphasizes, tourism development, particularly rural tourism, must be guided by a well-considered planning policy. This policy should not be driven solely by profit motives but also by a commitment to human well-being and happiness. Furthermore, Pejanović & Vujović (2008) note that rural development is an integral part of the European Union's evolving development philosophy, which prioritizes sustainability and long-term prosperity.

A rural area is generally defined as a region with low population density, where agriculture is the main occupation, and which is characterized by a distinct lifestyle, work practices, customs, and rural identity (Cvijanović & Ružić, 2017). Research highlights that "rurality", the unique characteristics of rural areas, can be a key asset in attracting tourists (Njegovan, 2016, p. 161). This type of area enables the development of rural tourism, which includes agritourism on agricultural farms and other forms of tourism that are realized in rural areas outside agricultural households (Cvijanović & Ružić, 2017).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines rural tourism as any form of tourism that takes place in rural areas, which is organized and managed by the local population and relies on local resources and facilities. This form of tourism appeals to visitors seeking authentic experiences, often centered around meaningful interactions with the local community. Rural tourism is thus characterized as "real" – it offers enriching experiences, provides opportunities for learning, and presents adventure in a way that rewards the spirit (OECD, 1994, p. 22).

Rural tourism, as a sustainable and multifunctional activity, is rooted in local natural and cultural resources and is deeply intertwined with traditional agriculture. Due to its diverse benefits, it is particularly recommended for rural areas (Mihailović & Moric, 2012). It plays a crucial role in the economic revitalization of rural regions and represents a significant source of income for rural households (Milićević & Štetic, 2017).



Rural tourism is considered to be aligned with the principles of sustainable development, as it enhances the value of rural spaces, natural and cultural resources, and traditional elements while ensuring their preservation (Franić & Grgić, 2002; Jelinčić, 2007; Krajinović *et al.*, 2011). This approach is vital for maintaining the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the context of globalization (Bosnić, 2011). The connection between sustainability and rural tourism is becoming increasingly significant, as more tourists express a desire to explore the rural environment and integrate into the social fabric of local communities (Sims, 2009).

Rural tourism, however, is often faced with some development limits like low visitor numbers, minimal infrastructure requirements, the appeal of local culture and traditions, particularly its economic profitability. Challenges include the seasonal fluctuations in demand, low occupancy rates, and the significant investments needed for the construction or adaptation of tourist facilities (Košić, 2012; Njegovan *et al.*, 2015).

The interest in rural tourism continues to grow, driven by the appeal of "untouched" rural areas that boast well-defined ways of life, culture, and customs. There is an increasing need to preserve these areas while providing local populations with income-generating opportunities through tourism services (Baćac, 2011). Agricultural production, the preservation of agricultural resources, and the development of rural tourism as a supplementary activity for rural inhabitants should be prioritized as key goals for rural development (Petrović & Grujović, 2015).

AGRITOURISM AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Recent research emphasizes agritourism as a growing and significant segment within the global tourism industry (Streifeneder *et al.*, 2023; Vukolić *et al.*, 2024). Agritourism is at the same time a traditional and modern form of tourism, deeply rooted in the geographical features, culture, traditions, and customs of rural areas (Franić & Cunj, 2007). According to Phillip *et al.* (2010), agritourism is an authentic form of rural tourism that offers tourists the opportunity to experience rural life firsthand. This includes participation in agricultural activities, interaction with animals and nature, and enjoying food produced and prepared directly on the farm. Agritourism mainly "relies on two basic sectors – agriculture and tourism" (Phillip *et al.*, 2010; Vukolić *et al.*, 2024, p. 92). The variations in the definition of agritourism are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of Agritourism Definitions in Scientific Studies

Definition	Source
"Visiting a working agricultural setting, usually a farm or ranch, for leisure, recreation or educational purposes."	Santeramo & Barbieri, 2017
"Tourism services provided by agricultural entrepreneurs within their own farm, allowing also visitors to take part, directly or indirectly, in agricultural activities."	Ammirato & Felicetti, 2014
"Any activity in which a visitor to the farm or other agricultural setting contemplates the farm landscape or participates in an agricultural process for recreation or leisure purposes."	Tew & Barbieri, 2012
"Any farm-based business offered for the enjoyment and education of the public, to promote the products of the farm, and thereby generate additional farm income."	Karabati <i>et al.</i> , 2009
"A specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to take part in agricultural or complementary activities on the property."	Marques, 2006

Source: Creation of the authors based on the literature review



Agritourism destinations attract a diverse audience, including local residents, amateur chefs, academics, and farmers (Joyner *et al.*, 2018). This form of tourism offers both economic and non-economic benefits to farmers, rural households, and local communities (Barbieri & Streifeneder, 2019; Bacsı & Száteleki, 2022). At the level of individual agricultural holdings, agritourism is closely linked to the environment, agriculture, and local craftsmanship (Veljković & Bročić, 2017). Typically, farm owners serve as the primary investors in agritourism initiatives (Sznajder *et al.*, 2009).

Statistical Insights into Agritourism in Serbia

Obtaining clear numerical data and indicators regarding rural tourism and rural development in Serbia remains a challenge. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, out of 631,552 farms, 78,301 (12.4%) reported income from non-agricultural activities. Among these, only 514 farms (0.7%) were involved in tourism-related activities. Nonetheless, the 2023 Census of Agriculture shows progress, with this figure rising to 1.4%.

Farms participating in Serbia increased from 0.7% to 1.4% over last 11 years, which represents a doubling of farms participating in tourism activities. Although encouraging this growth is modest compared to other countries. In countries with more established agritourism sectors, such as Italy, the percentage of farms involved in agritourism typically ranges from 10% to 20%, with some regions exceeding this range (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica – ISTAT). Compared to regional trends, Serbia's growth in agritourism participation has been relatively slow. Compared regionally, Serbia's agritourism sector has experienced slower expansion. Eastern European and Mediterranean countries such as Romania and Bulgaria have seen more rapid growth, largely driven by stronger EU support, funding programs, and integrated rural development policies that emphasize income diversification for farmers. Conversely, Serbia's agritourism sector remains in the early stages of development. While the increase in participation is encouraging, it reflects a gradual pace of institutional and market evolution. To accelerate growth, it is essential to increase investment in rural infrastructure, provide specialized training for farmers, and strengthen the marketing efforts promoting Serbia's agritourism potential.

The important step for development of agritourism was enacting of the Hospitality Law, which primary objectives are to curb the informal economy and enhance Serbia's competitiveness as a tourist destination. In line with these objectives, the implementation of a central information system in the hospitality and tourism sector, E-Tourist, was initiated. This system consolidates all data regarding hospitality providers and accommodation establishments in the Republic of Serbia. The portal also enables access to information on the number of households in rural areas engaged in agritourism.



Table 2. Overview of the Number of Agricultural Farms (AF) and Rural Tourist Households (RTH) in Serbia

	Districts	Number of AF 2012.	Number of AF 2023.	Number of RTH 2023.
Belgrade	Belgrade District	33244	26211	22
	West Bačka District	18337	13676	14
Belgrade	South Banat District	25629	18549	16
	South Bačka District	31867	23622	40
	North Banat District	14345	11691	15
	North Bačka District	11361	9607	14
	Central Banat District	16772	13193	2
	Srem District	29313	21612	41
	Zlatibor District	46944	43085	115
Šumadija and Western Serbia	Kolubara District	27604	23221	42
	Mačva District	44701	37660	45
	Moravica District	29380	27786	67
	Pomoravlje District	24990	19236	14
	Rasina District	34207	25261	23
	Raška District	28173	22282	43
	Šumadija District	26941	24889	51
Southern and Eastern Serbia	Bor District	12596	10073	43
	Braničevo District	26722	20432	11
	Zaječar District	16690	13502	120
	Jablanica District	27920	21350	11
	Nišava District	31283	24251	35
	Pirot District	11873	8386	20
	Podunavlje District	19120	15529	2
	Pčinja District	25228	18411	8
TOTAL:	Toplica District	16312	13810	2
		631552	508325	816

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from Census of agriculture and E-Tourist platform

Table 2 presents the structure of agricultural holdings and rural tourist households at the district level. A comparison of the two Censuses of Agriculture reveals a decline in the number of registered agricultural holdings between 2012 and 2023. According to data from the 2012 Census, 514 farms provided tourist services. However, more recent data from the E-Tourist platform shows an increase in this number, reaching 816 farms. It is important to highlight that these farms are registered as rural tourist households, representing the country's agritourism offerings.

Agritourism and Sustainability

Agritourism and sustainability have emerged as central topics in global tourism research (Flanigan *et al.*, 2014; Merciu & Teodorescu, 2023). In this context, Table 3 offers an overview of diverse research trends and approaches related to agritourism and sustainable development.

**Table 3.** Examples of Diverse Research Trends in Scientific Studies on Agritourism and Sustainable Development

Authors	Year	Type of research used in the research paper
Yusuf & Wulandari	2023	PRISMA method for literature study
Zhao et al.	2022	Empirical research using structural equation modeling (SEM)
Bacsi & Szálteleki	2022	FADN database, descriptive statistics, correlations and panel regression
Ait-Yahia Ghidouche <i>et al.</i>	2021	Interviews with professionals and experts in the fields of agriculture and tourism
Akhmadi& Yekti	2021	Field observation, interviews with farmers and related parties
Ammirato <i>et al.</i>	2020	Holistic outlook, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) technique
Joyner <i>et al.</i>	2018	Photo-elicitation with five focus groups
Bradić <i>et al.</i>	2017	Qualitative and quantitative research, descriptive statistics, correlations, regression
Christou <i>et al.</i>	2009	Fieldwork, ethnographic study
Franić & Grgić	2002	Macroeconomic analysis of agricultural tourism issues

Source: Authors' compilation based on the literature review

Research of the agritourism has been expanded, moving beyond purely economic considerations to encompass the preservation of natural resources and landscapes, as well as the promotion and utilization of existing tangible assets – such as infrastructure, historical sites, and local culinary specialties – and intangible assets like cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Havale *et al.*, 2023). Recently sustainability has become a central focus within these efforts, particularly as agriculture-based development continues to face pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation, and the loss of biodiversity (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Ammirato *et al.*, 2020).

Sustainability aims to achieve enduring outcomes by creating networks that balance economic, social, and environmental goals within communities. These networks seek to optimize advantages and disadvantages for key stakeholders while ensuring that resource quality is not compromised (Saxena *et al.*, 2007). Muresan *et al.* (2016) emphasize that agritourism plays a key role in connecting the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. The economic and social significance of agritourism can be observed at several levels, including the national economy, regional and local economies, and agritourism farms, as outlined by Njegovan (2016). The economic importance of agritourism is primarily driven by tourist expenditures related to accommodation and gastronomic services in the visited areas. These expenditures generate significant economic effects for the agricultural sector, other local businesses, and the broader community (Njegovan, 2016). As noted by Ndhlovu & Dube (2024), sustainability underscores the potential for touristic enterprises to enhance their profitability by diversifying to agritourism. Socially, agritourism also influences the rural population. The social impact includes cultural exchange, educational opportunities, and a better understanding between urban and rural populations (Njegovan, 2016). Cultural sustainability plays a vital role in safeguarding the distinct cultural heritage of touristic destinations. Alongside political sustainability, agritourism is crucial for guaranteeing that tourism development reflects and supports the priorities and well-being of local communities (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). Njegovan (2016) highlights the ecological role of agritourism, which includes the following elements: raising awareness about environmental protection, developing



local infrastructure and facilities according to ecological standards, enhancing the aesthetic value of rural areas, and improving public utility services focused on environmental protection. According to Ndhlovu & Dube (2024), agritourism enterprises play a role in safeguarding the environment by preserving natural ecosystems. Havale *et al.* (2023) emphasize that practices such as the reuse, restoration, revitalization, reproduction, and enhancement of resources within agritourism should be encouraged as a foundation for promoting sustainable tourism.

Bukovec (2024) emphasizes that agritourism guides the broader agricultural sector toward sustainability – not only by fostering tourism-related initiatives but also by advocating a model of “sustainable integral development” in which primary agriculture remains central.

The Alignment of Agritourism with Sustainable Development Goals

When considering the relationship between agritourism and the sustainable development goals, several authors emphasize its role in achieving key objectives, including the reduction of poverty in rural areas, the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, and improvements in health and well-being. Agritourism also serves as a mean of informal education, fostering quality education opportunities. Additionally, it contributes to more efficient water and land resource management and plays a part in climate change mitigation (Ait-Yahia Ghidouche *et al.*, 2021; Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023; Rajani & Boluk, 2022).

To summarize the key points discussed above, an overview of agritourism sustainability is presented in Table 4. This table provides a concise matrix that outlines various factors contributing to the sustainable development of agritourism.

Table 4. The Agritourism Sustainability Matrix

Economic Perspective	Environmental Perspective	Social Perspective
Provision of additional income streams for farmers	Sustainable management of raw materials and natural resources	Offering alternative employment opportunities for family members
Strengthening of small agricultural enterprises	Promotion of ecologically-friendly practices	Promotion of "well-being" as a lifestyle in rural areas
Stimulation of local economic growth	Conservation of the natural environment	Preservation and revitalization of cultural-historic heritage
Encouragement of infrastructure development	Reduction of negative impacts on the environment	Education of visitors about agriculture and rural life

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Ammirato, S., Felicetti, A. M., Raso, C., Panseara, B. A., & Violi, A. (2020). Agritourism and sustainability: What we can learn from a systematic literature review. *Sustainability* 12(22), 9575.

The agritourism sustainability matrix highlights the way how agritourism supports rural development by providing additional income for farmers, creating jobs, and strengthening small agricultural enterprises. It promotes eco-friendly practices, natural resource conservation, and infrastructure improvement. Additionally, it promotes the preservation of cultural heritage, enhances visitor awareness of rural life and agriculture, and supports both local economic development and environmental sustainability.



THE OFFER OF RURAL TOURIST HOUSEHOLDS AS THE FOUNDATION OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The essence of the rural tourism offering is described as "a stay in renovated country houses in a traditional style, with the possibility of preparing food independently, getting to know traditional cultural values and customs, all within an ecologically healthy environment" (Pejanović & Vujović, 2008, p. 11).

In the Republic of Serbia, rural tourism offerings are characterized by facilities and capacities for providing catering services, as well as the range of services and products available to rural tourists. In addition to accommodation and food, rural tourism offerings can also include a variety of one-day activities (Cvijanović & Ružić, 2017).

These hospitality services are identified as non-agricultural activities carried out by farmers in the capacity of legal entity (entrepreneur, business company, agricultural cooperative, institution, or other legal entity) or natural person (a farmer, independently or together with members of his household). In order to offer hospitality services they have to fulfil general and specific legal requirements set by law, i.e. fulfill sanitary, hygienic and technical conditions for accommodation facilities, obtain decision on categorization of accommodation facility. Individuals (natural persons) may provide certain hospitality services of accommodation, preparation and serving of food, drinks and beverages within a rural tourist household, under the restrictive conditions prescribed by the law (Law on Hospitality, Art. 4, para. 2), which are related to the conditions regarding the provision of services, conditions that must be fulfilled by a natural person, as a caterer and fiscal conditions for the provision of catering services (Mićović, 2024).

According to the Serbian Law on Hospitality (Off. Gazette RS, No. 17/2019), a rural tourist household is defined as a facility or group of facilities that provides accommodation services, preparation and serving of food, drinks and beverages, or only accommodation services, located in a rural (country-side) environment with elements of local character and heritage (Art. 2, para. 1, point 12). While the common term used in Serbian law and practice for these facilities is "seosko turističko domaćinstvo," typically translated as "rural tourist household" (Serbian Business Registers Agency), comparative legal terminology more often aligns with the English term "agritourism farms."

In Italian law, accommodation facilities related to agritourism – defined as reception and hospitality businesses managed by agricultural entrepreneurs (Art. 2135 of the Italian Civil Code) – are understood as premises located in rural buildings operated by farmers. Similarly, the French legislator defines tourist reception facilities located on the farm or its premises as establishments managed by farm operators that provide furnished accommodation for rent, open-air lodging, leisure activities, or catering services (Art. 343-1 of the French Tourism Code in relation to Art. D. 722-4 of the Rural and Maritime Fishing Code). According to Art. 2, para. 3 of the Italian Law on Agritourism, No. 96 of February 20, 2006, agritourism activities encompass accommodation in lodgings or open spaces for campers; meals and beverages served typically consist mainly of the farm's own products or those sourced from nearby farms, including alcohol and spirits, with a preference for regional specialties or items listed as traditional regional foods. Recreational, cultural, educational, sports, hiking, and horseback riding activities may take place both on and off the farm and can be offered through agreements with local authorities to promote the territory and rural heritage. In France, professional organizations use the term "agritourism" to describe all activities that are not directly related to food production (Violier, <https://gisetudestouristiques.fr/en/encyclopedia/agritourism/>).



Even though legal terms may vary from country to country, their legal scope and meaning overlap to a considerable extent. Consistency across different national legal frameworks can be observed in several key areas:: requirement that the operator must be a registered farmer and actively participate in the service provided to tourists; type of the services that may be provided by rural tourist household, i.e., agricultural farm (accommodation, food and beverage services, other supplementary services, such as recreational, cultural, sports activities etc.); general approach to limitations of the agritourism activity, particularly when such activity is performed by individual, i.e., natural person (setting the upper limit for indoor and outdoor accommodation capacity and the number service users, stimulating self-production by limiting the gastronomic offer only to food and beverages consisting mainly from the farm's own products, conditioning the provision of food and drinks only to guests to whom accommodation service is provided, except in the case of the organized group of tourists who are not required to use accommodation services. etc.). To a lesser extent, differences between different national laws may be identified in the case of specific provisions regulating particular limitations of the agritourism activity performed by individuals, i.e. natural persons. For example, the upper limit for accommodation capacity and number of service users varies from up to 30 individual beds, for a maximum of 30 service users (Serbian Law on Hospitality, Art. 30), up to 20 beds for 30 persons at a time (Montenegrinian Law on Tourism and Hospitality, Art. 103), up to 10 rooms for 20 guests at a time (Croatian Law on Hospitality, Art. 39), up to 10 guests (Italian Law on Agritourism, Art. 4).

Despite the diversity of services, primary and supplementary, agritourism can be described as "a unique and relatively homogeneous group of tourist services, essentially a package of services" (Njegovan, 2016, p. 171). Sustainable products and services in tourism, with their environmental and social variables, have a strong impact on the value and overall satisfaction of tourists (Torres-Sovero *et al.*, 2012). Homburg & Giering (2001) state that satisfaction is related to service evaluation and tourist experience. Rural tourists' satisfaction with the products and services offered by agritourism has a positive effect on their future intentions (Christou *et al.*, 2009).

Table 5. Overview of Agritourism Offer Categories

Agritourism Accommodation	Accommodation on a farm
	Accommodation in a cottage
	Agritourism hotel
	"Self-service" overnight stay
	Agritourism camp
Agritourism Gastronomy	Food in the host's house
	Canteen
	Restaurant
Primary Agritourism	Observation of the production process
	Participation in the production process
	Educational tours
	Direct contact with animals
Direct Agritourism Sales	Direct sale of agricultural products
	"Choose your own product"
	Agricultural stores



Agritourism Recreation	Recreation during vacation
	Weekend recreation
	Longer stay during vacation at the farm
Agritourism Sports	Hiking and mountaineering
	Horse riding
	A sport that requires a lot of space
	New generation games
	Hunting
	Fishing
Agritourism Entertainment	Tour of parks and gardens
	Agrotourism excursions
Agritourism Therapy	Animal-assisted therapy
	Therapy with the application of plant and animal medicinal properties
	Specific diets (nutrition)
	Mini health resorts
Cultural Tourism within Agritourism	Historic (authentic) farms
	Historic villages
	Museums of folk art and agriculture
	Celebration of holidays and festivals
	Stay in villages that have a rich folklore heritage

Source: Njegovan, Z. (2016). *Ekonomika turizma i seoskog turizma*. Faculty of Agriculture, Novi Sad, Serbia, p. 175 – based on Sznajder, M., Przeborska, L., & Scrimgeour, F. (2009). *Agritourism*. CAB International, UK.

Table 5 presents the agritourism offerings, categorized into distinct groups. Notably, several products, services, and activities stand out as sustainable, such as accommodations in country houses (especially when these accommodations adhere to ecological sustainability standards), nature-based activities, educational programs, and similar initiatives.



MANAGING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRITOURISM

According to Bjeljac *et al.* (2013), tourism valorization plays a crucial role in developing strategic plans for a destination. This process is most effective when all communities, including locals and tourists, are involved in identifying authenticity and distinguishing between different tourist offerings (Pantović *et al.*, 2023). Strategic plans are executed at different levels to ensure that tourism destinations are in line with the objectives of sustainable tourism development (Đorđević *et al.*, 2024).

In agritourism development, a strategic and thoughtful approach is crucial for achieving its goals and ensuring sustainable growth within specific destinations. This involves making informed decisions regarding resource allocation, target markets, product development, and marketing strategies (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023). The following strategies are essential for promoting sustainable agritourism:

1. Increasing added value through product and service diversification (Akhmadi & Yekti, 2021);
2. Sustainable marketing that promotes environmentally and socially responsible tourism (Joyner *et al.*, 2018);
3. Building strong networks among stakeholders, including government, local communities, the tourism industry, and educational or research institutions (Joyner *et al.*, 2018);
4. Environmental preservation to maintain the ecological balance of rural areas (Zhao *et al.*, 2022);
5. Community engagement and empowerment to ensure that local residents benefit from and actively participate in the tourism process (Zhao *et al.*, 2022).

Additionally, it is important to consider the concept of managing the sustainable development of rural tourism. The framework for this is provided in the Master Plan for the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism in Serbia (Njegovan *et al.*, 2015).

In the Republic of Serbia, the legal framework for fostering environmental responsibility in the tourism and hospitality sector encompasses documents ranging from higher-level sources, such as the Constitution, to lower-level ones, including specific laws and regulations (Bradić *et al.*, 2017).

Given the importance of sustainable rural tourism development, there is a clear and pressing need for the formulation and active implementation of a dedicated Rural Tourism Development Strategy in the Republic of Serbia. This strategy should be closely aligned with the broader Tourism Development Strategy and the Master Plan for the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism. Crucially, it must incorporate agritourism as a central component.

Serbia, as an EU candidate, has access to the IPARD (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development) funds, which support rural development and agritourism initiatives. These funds are primarily designed to enhance agricultural practices but have also been utilized in certain regions to promote agritourism, offering an opportunity to diversify rural incomes and expand tourism offerings.

In Vojvodina, Šumadija, and parts of Southern Serbia, agritourism initiatives have been driven by efforts of local authorities and regional tourism organizations. Additionally, various pilot programs have been implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies, particularly in rural areas with strong agritourism potential. These programs typically focus on small-scale initiatives, such as farm stays, local food experiences, and the promotion of traditional cultural practices, aiming to assess the viability of agritourism before broader application.



Sustainable rural tourism development is a continuous process that requires ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and the implementation of corrective or preventive measures (Radović *et al.*, 2013). Tourism, as an economic sector, requires regulation to ensure it is sustainable, profitable, and accessible to all social groups. Achieving sustainable and responsible rural tourism, particularly agritourism, is challenging without embracing "green thinking" – the core principle of ecotourism (Ana, 2017, p. 3295). Sustainability in rural tourism must also encompass the rehabilitation of traditional lifestyles, respecting indigenous knowledge, norms, and practices, while safeguarding customary rights (Đorđević & Milovanović, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

In the paper, a literature review was conducted to provide better insight into agritourism as a strategy for supporting the sustainable development of rural areas, with a specific focus on the context of the Republic of Serbia.

Agritourism brings numerous benefits to rural areas and communities. Economically, it contributes to the diversification of the rural economy, increases income within the agricultural sector, and reduces dependence on seasonal and volatile markets. The development of agritourism in Vojvodina and Šumadija are good examples which have shown a positive impact on the increase of local income. The significant increase in number of rural households engaging in agritourism-related activities has been observed over the past decade according to a report by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. Furthermore, agritourism enhances local infrastructure and improves the quality of life in rural areas. There are numerous examples of good praxis in Serbia including the development of tourist infrastructure in rural areas, such as improved roads, signage, and services.

Agritourism plays an important role in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage by providing visitors the opportunity to experience local lifestyles, traditions, and culture. This not only fosters a deeper connection between the local population and tourists but also creates mutually beneficial relationships. Some agritourism enterprises in Šumadija are good examples that offer tourists the opportunity to be involved in local tradition works, such as grape harvesting, cheese-making, and participation in folk festivals.

Additionally, agritourism encourages sustainable practices aligned with environmental protection, contributing to the long-term sustainability of rural areas. In Vojvodina there are examples that agritourism businesses are increasingly adopting organic farming techniques and promoting environmentally friendly tourism practices such as waste reduction, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation. There are also numerous examples of rural tourist households that successfully implement their activities in accordance with sustainable development principles, located on the southern slopes of Mount Suvobor, at the foothills of the Stara Planina, and several examples of farmsteads around the Fruška Gora.

When a rural area or destination decides to use agritourism as a tool for development, it is essential to carefully plan and manage this growth. The development strategy must meet the needs of rural tourists while ensuring the prosperity and sustainable growth of the local community. As the concept of sustainability becomes increasingly important, rural households and other stakeholders in agritourism must consider sustainable practices in their business models and future development. Rural tourism enterprises that successfully integrate sustainability into their operations can become leaders in responsible tourism, generating positive outcomes for both the community and the environment.



It is crucial to establish regulations and guidelines that preserve the authenticity and sustainability of agritourism activities while simultaneously achieving economic benefits and minimizing negative impacts on the local community and environment.

Despite its growing importance, the scientific literature lacks a comprehensive overview of the long-term impact and benefits of agritourism for the sustainable development of rural areas, a point that is also emphasized by Ammirato *et al.* (2020). However, the scientific literature has a very positive vision of agritourism, which is in line with the goals of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030.

The Serbian government, in collaboration with the EU, has recently introduced a range of policies and incentives aimed at fostering environmentally responsible practices. These include financial support through IPARD, national strategies, and local government initiatives. While agritourism in Serbia holds significant potential for promoting sustainable practices and driving economic growth, realizing its full potential as a cornerstone for rural development requires concrete actions in policy, support, and financing. A comprehensive Rural Tourism Development Strategy should be created and implemented, as well. For agritourism to thrive, it is essential to provide targeted training and support for rural hosts interested in engaging in this sector. It is essentially important to facilitate access to financing funds for enabling local and rural tourism stakeholders to align their activities with sustainable development goals. Encouraging agritourism development also calls for stronger collaboration between local authorities, the private sector, and relevant associations, alongside enhanced consultancy services, an initiative currently being advanced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management.

The agritourism development in Serbia advocates a holistic approach, like successful models implemented in European countries such as Italy, France, and Spain. These countries have established strategies and programs that provide intensive support for agritourism entrepreneurs while simultaneously focusing on the protection and promotion of cultural heritage.

The following research questions for future studies emerge from the paper:

1. Q1. What are examples of good sustainable practices implemented in Serbian agritourism enterprises, and what factors influence their adoption?
2. Q2. How significantly have different types of agritourism services influenced local sustainable development in Serbia?
3. Q3. How effectively have development policy programs supported sustainable agritourism development in Serbia?

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the integration of tourism and agriculture offers the potential to create a sustainable model that contributes to overall prosperity. Continued research and development in this sector are essential for unlocking its full potential and securing long-term benefits for all stakeholders involved.

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AGROTURIZAM KAO KATALIZATOR ODRŽIVOG RURALNOG RAZVOJA: PREGLED LITERATURE

Rezime:

Agroturizam igra ključnu ulogu u promociji održivog razvoja u ruralnim područjima integrišući turizam sa poljoprivrednom praksom. Kao oblik ruralnog turizma, on ne samo da doprinosi očuvanju prirodnog i kulturnog nasleđa, već i promoviše ekonomsku revitalizaciju i društvenu koheziju u zajednicama koje često pate od depopulacije i ekonomske stagnacije. Održive prakse u okviru agroturizma, kao što su organska poljoprivreda, energetska efikasnost i ekološki prihvatljive aktivnosti, dodatno jačaju njegov potencijal kao strateškog alata za ruralni razvoj. Ovaj rad razmatra postojeću literaturu o agroturizmu kao ključnoj strategiji za održivi ruralni razvoj, fokusirajući se na njegovu potencijalnu primenu u Republici Srbiji. Pored toga, predstavljeni su relevantni statistički podaci iz nacionalnih baza podataka kako bi se ilustrovalo trenutno stanje agroturizma u zemlji. U radu se naglašava važnost efikasnog upravljanja razvojem održivog agroturizma i predlažu ključna pitanja za dalja istraživanja. Cilj ovih pitanja je da se poboljša razumevanje održivog agroturizma u Republici Srbiji. Sintetizujući postojeće nalaze, rad takođe ističe potrebu za kontinuiranim istraživanjem u ovoj oblasti kako bi se podržalo kreiranje razvojnih politika zasnovanih na dokazima i dizajn efikasnih strategija ruralnog razvoja.

Ključne reči:

održivi razvoj,
ruralni turizam,
ruralna područja,
ruralna turistička domaćinstva.

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