
THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRITOURISM IN ROMANIA IN THE OPINION OF PENSION ADMINISTRATORS

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism should encompass all tourism forms, support local communities, and protect the environment while meeting diverse tourist demands. Agritourism offers a viable alternative, with growing interest in rural areas and eco-friendly agricultural products. This study analyzes agritourism sustainability by evaluating the share of self-produced agricultural consumption in guesthouses, based on a survey among administrators from five key Romanian counties: Argeş, Braşov, Dâmboviţa, Prahova, and Teleorman. Results highlight the critical role of ecological products and green strategies in promoting sustainable tourism behavior. The findings underline the need to integrate cultural and ecological elements into tourism to foster responsible practices. This research offers tourism managers and policymakers a practical foundation for encouraging environmentally conscious tourism development and supporting green consumption.

Introduction

Tourism can contribute to a wider and more dense measure to sustainable development and to the eradication of social and economic poverty. For this, initiatives in favor of sustainable development are useful: the global-local association, so vital in the field of transport, decentralized cooperation, the transversality of tourism, economic balancing through environmental development, through governance, the transition from friendly pact to democratic practice. (Pranita et al, 2022; Băbăţ et al., 2023; Andrei 2014; Vasile 2016). The dimensions of sustainable development force responsible tourism to enter

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into a collective logic, around group objectives (Kapera 2018; Penjišević et al., 2024; Madeira et al, 2023). Rural tourism with a focus on sustainability and responsible consumption represents a key approach in the context of global concerns related to the conservation of natural resources (Kabil et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022; Lee 2010). In an era where climate change and environmental impact are becoming increasingly evident, this type of tourism is becoming a strategic and responsible option (Funduk et al, 2024; Bhuiyan, 2022; Xu, 2023).

In this sense, quality management of agritourism activities, integrating ecological and social principles, is essential for protecting rural ecosystems and supporting local communities, so that tourism brings sustainable benefits. Agritourism, by promoting authentic rural experiences and offering organic agricultural products, contributes to the development of a sustainable form of agritourism, supporting both the environment and local communities (Priatmoko et al. 2023; Oltean and Gabor 2022; Bacoș and Gabor, 2021; Crăciun et al., 2022). Romanian guesthouse managers believe that the sustainability of agritourism depends on the integration of sustainable agricultural practices that capitalize on local resources and promote traditional products. Adding details about the agriculture specific to each area contributes to the authenticity of the experiences offered, thus strengthening the attractiveness and long-term viability of Romanian agritourism (Priatmoko et al. 2023; Oltean and Gabor 2022). In recent years, agritourism has experienced significant growth in Romania. According to the National Institute of Statistics, the number of agritourism accommodation units increased by approximately 20% between 2015 and 2020, highlighting the growing interest in rural and sustainable tourism.

Romania has a growing organic agricultural area, occupying over 3% of total agricultural land, according to Eurostat data. Organic farmers contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of a healthy rural environment, which makes agritourism more attractive to tourists looking for authentic and sustainable experiences.

According to a study conducted by the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC), over 70% of guesthouse managers believe that integrating local products and sustainable agricultural practices is essential for the long-term success of their business. They emphasize that tourists are increasingly interested in sustainability and the consumption of traditional products.

The current research largely aligns with the existing literature that argues that sustainable tourism should be applicable to all forms of tourism, supporting local communities, protecting the environment, and meeting the needs of as many tourists as possible. In particular, agritourism is recognized as a viable alternative in the context of sustainable tourism, offering tourists the opportunity to spend time in rural areas and consume organic agricultural products.

However, our study makes a specific contribution by focusing on Romanian agritourism and by analyzing in detail the share of consumption of own agricultural products in

agritourism guesthouses. The survey results indicate that the use of organic products and the implementation of organic strategies are essential for promoting sustainable behavior, reinforcing the idea that agritourism can significantly contribute to sustainable tourism.

Unlike other works that may address sustainable tourism in a more general manner, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural and ecological aspects into agritourism practice.

Literature review

Studies have shown that tourism can only exist thanks to a clean environment, because tourists seek peace, clean air, etc. (Grecu, 2023; Robu et al. 2019; Radovanović et al, 2024; Bacos 2021; Morales-Urrutia et al, 2020). The first attempts to promote this were made at the Rio Conference in 1992, which allowed the use of the concept of sustainable development in the field of tourism. Bădulescu et al. (2015) consider that an important aspect of sustainable rural tourism is the promotion of ecological products and responsible consumption. Agritourism guesthouses can play a role in this direction, offering tourists local agricultural products, produced sustainably and without affecting the ecological balance of the area (Ciolac et al., 2021; Ciolac et al, 2020).

According to Palazzo et al. (2018), pollution reduction is another challenge and priority in the context of sustainable rural tourism. Efficient waste management and the use of renewable energy sources are key elements in efforts to minimize negative environmental impacts.

The need for quality management in agritourism guesthouse activities includes not only environmental aspects, but also social and cultural implications (Andrei and Dragoi 2020). Protecting local traditions and involving communities in the tourism process are essential to ensuring sustainable development of this sector (Priatmoko et al. 2023; Đaković et al., 2024; Rahmat, 2021). Sustainable rural tourism represents a viable and responsible solution for tourists seeking to experience the beauty of the rural environment as well as the consumption of organic agricultural products (Su et al, 2023; Firoiu, 2019).

Also, Tong et al. (2024) believe that the development of rural tourism is important in the fusion of culture and the tourism industry, facilitating rural revitalization. Thus, agritourism can significantly contribute to resource conservation, increasing the consumption of local agricultural products, and caring for the environment and local communities (Stefan, 2021; Shafiee et al, 2019). The article by Gargia-Garcia et al. (2023) suggests further exploration of how sustainability can be incorporated as a focal point for development, thereby mitigating the impact of tourism on destinations. The reasons for our scientific approach are the following: by studying the specialized literature, we found that there are certain inconsistencies between the concepts with which rural tourism operates, overlaps or insufficient information to understand it; the desire to support environmental organizations in their approach to orienting the population towards the consumption/use of ecological products; providing a study base

for administrators in the rural environment; encouraging Romanian tourists to get to know their country, traditions, customs; last but not least, we wanted to sound an alarm regarding the need to establish objectives within rural tourism from a sustainability perspective.

In preparing the study, we relied on the conclusions of scientific papers (Gabor 2023; Oltean and Gabor 2021) and sought to answer a series of questions related to the need for quality management in agritourism guesthouse activities, which takes into account environmental protection.

Materials and methods

The data collection period was 01.02.2023 – 01.12.2023. We chose a long period for two reasons: the involvement of tourists in agricultural activities occurs predominantly in the analyzed period and the sample size. The questionnaire was processed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program, which allowed the calculation of statistical indicators used to interpret the survey results from the point of view of their relevance and to create a structural equation model using the Smart PLS program. SPSS ensured rigorous preliminary data processing and facilitated their preparation for advanced modeling. The data were statistically validated before being imported into Smart PLS. Smart PLS complements the analysis performed in SPSS, allowing the modeling of complex causal relationships between the analyzed variables, providing a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the phenomenon studied.

The researched population is represented by all rural guesthouses in Romania. The observation unit is made up of managers from rural guesthouses in Braşov, Dâmboviţa, Prahova, Argeş and Teleorman counties, chosen for their representativeness in Romanian agritourism. The survey unit follows the administrators of agritourism guesthouses in the reference counties. Sampling method and sample size. Simple random sampling was used. The sample included 300 agritourism guesthouses, and the number of validated questionnaires was 291, which represents a 97% response rate. Data collection technique. Data collection was carried out by the opinion poll method, face-to-face survey. The questionnaire used contains 26 questions, of which: 5 to establish the profile of the agritourism guesthouse, 11 closed, 2 open and 8 mixed. Central hypothesis “The sustainability of agritourism is directly proportional to the involvement of agritourism guesthouse administrators in increasing the consumption of organic products and capitalizing on local historical and cultural heritage”.

The research is based on five hypotheses resulting from free discussions held with agritourism guesthouse administrators in the studied counties, but also based on the questionnaire. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1 - There is a high degree of use in agricultural production, in the operation of the guesthouse of techniques/procedures with an impact on environmental protection (reduction of water and energy consumption; reduction of waste production);

H2 - Agritourism guesthouse administrators are concerned with capitalizing on the historical and cultural heritage of the territory;

H3 - The consumption of organic products is positively influenced by their own production;

H4 - Promoting environmental awareness, recommending visitors to protect the environment, using eco-design of buildings, knowing about certified ecological products and obtaining eco-labels determines an increase in ecological and sustainable behavior among the community;

H5 - There is a positive association between administrators' concern for the use of strategies/policies in the field of activity organization and an increase in the number of accommodation nights.

Following hypothesis testing, we find that all hypotheses were verified, the results being presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Testing hypotheses

Hypotheses	The tested value	Number of degrees of freedom, df	The statistics results (t)	Mean Difference	Confidence Interval of the Difference	Sig. <0.05	Verifying the hypotheses
H1	0,08	290	40,77	3,44	3,27-3,60	0	Check
H2	0,08	290	42,26	3,64	3,47-3,81	0	Check
H3	0,61	290	70,67	4,35	4,23-4,47	0	Check
H4	0,06	290	70,67	4,35	4,23-4,47	0	Check
H5	0,04	290	42,26, respective 20,95	3,64, respective 0,87	3,47-3,81, respective 0,79-0,96	0	Check

Source: processing of authors

The sample included agrotourism guesthouses, distributed by counties, as follows: 94 from Dambovită county, 92 from Brașov county, 83 from Prahova county, 15 from Argeș county and 7 from Teleorman county. The sample structure is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample structure

Boarding house								
			1 daisy	2 daisy	3 daisy	4 daisy	5 daisy	Total
County	BV	Count	2	16	65	8	1	92
		% of Total	0.7%	5.5%	22.3%	2.7%	0.3%	31.6%
	PH	Count	2	26	41	11	3	83
		% of Total	0.7%	8.9%	14.1%	3.8%	1.0%	28.5%
	DB	Count	4	36	45	9	0	94
		% of Total	1.4%	12.4%	15.5%	3.1%	0.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	0	7	4	4	0	15
		% of Total	0.0%	2.4%	1.4%	1.4%	0.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	0	0	7	0	0	7
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	8	85	162	32	4	291
		% of Total	2.7%	29.2%	55.7%	11.0%	1.4%	100.0%
Accommodation places								
			0-20 places	21-40 places	41-60 places	61-80 places	81-100 places	Total
County	BV	Count	51	29	9	2	1	92
		% of Total	17.5%	10.0%	3.1%	0.7%	0.3%	31.6%
	PH	Count	44	33	5	0	1	83
		% of Total	15.1%	11.3%	1.7%	0.0%	0.3%	28.5%
	DB	Count	45	41	4	2	2	94
		% of Total	15.5%	14.1%	1.4%	.7%	0.7%	32.3%
	AG	Count	6	2	7	0	0	15
		% of Total	2.1%	.7%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	7	0	0	0	0	7
		% of Total	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	153	105	25	4	4	291
		% of Total	52.6%	36.1%	8.6%	1.4%	1.4%	100.0%

Source: author processing

H1 - There is a high degree of use in agricultural production, in the operation of the guesthouse of techniques/procedures with an impact on environmental protection (reduction of water and energy consumption; reduction of waste production);

Table 3 presents the distribution of responses regarding the reduction of water and energy consumption by county (BV, PH, DB, AG, TR) and the level of satisfaction (to a very small extent; to a small extent, neither, nor, to a large extent, to a very large extent). 21% of administrators in Prahova county and 14.4% administrators in Braşov and Dâmboviţa counties resort to various solutions to minimize consumption. Implementing energy efficiency and water saving measures will not only reduce the

ecological impact of the guesthouse, but will also be able to attract customers who appreciate the commitment to sustainability. Through these efforts, agrotourism guesthouses can become examples of good practices in responsible tourism, while offering a pleasant and environmentally friendly experience for visitors (table 3).

Table 3. Reducing enery and water consumption

			In a very small degree	in small degree	neithe, nor	in big degree	in very big degree	Total
County	BV	Count	7	17	10	16	42	92
		% of Total	2.4%	5.8%	3.4%	5.5%	14.4%	31.6%
	PH	Count	4	3	9	6	61	83
		% of Total	1.4%	1.0%	3.1%	2.1%	21.0%	28.5%
	DB	Count	8	14	13	17	42	94
		% of Total	2.7%	4.8%	4.5%	5.8%	14.4%	32.3%
	AG	Count	0	0	1	1	13	15
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	4.5%	5.2%
	TR	Count	0	0	0	1	6	7
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.1%	2.4%
Total		Count	19	34	33	41	164	291
		% of Total	6.5%	11.7%	11.3%	14.1%	56.4%	100.0%

Source: processing of authors

Overall, the results reflect the administrators' concern for savings to a very high degree. The table highlights that selective collection is the main method of waste sorting, with higher application in Braşov (16.5%), Prahova (16.5%) and Dâmboviţa (21.0%) counties, these counties being leaders in adopting responsible practices. However, Argeş (1.0%) and Teleorman (2.4%) counties have a low involvement in selective collection, which suggests the need for better implemented local policies for waste management. The lack of response or absence of sustainable practices is notable in Braşov (14.8%), Prahova (10.0%) and Dâmboviţa (11.0%) counties, which indicates the existence of gaps even in the more active regions. Innovative solutions, such as the use of solar panels or partnerships with sanitation companies, are almost non-existent, suggesting an exclusive focus on traditional methods (table 4).

Table 4. Waste sorting methods

			Lack of answer	selective collection	solar panels, eco dumpers	partnerships with sanitation companies	Total
County	BV	Count	43	48	0	1	92
		% of Total	14.8%	16.5%	0.0%	0.3%	31.6%
	PH	Count	29	48	0	6	83
		% of Total	10.0%	16.5%	0.0%	2.1%	28.5%
	DB	Count	32	61	1	0	94
		% of Total	11.0%	21.0%	0.3%	0.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	12	3	0	0	15
		% of Total	4.1%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	0	7	0	0	7
		% of Total	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	116	167	1	7	291
		% of Total	39.9%	57.4%	0.3%	2.4%	100.0%

Source: processing of authors

Most agrotourism guesthouse administrators state that they largely apply measures to reduce waste production, especially since waste management has become a major problem due to the increase in its quantity and diversity, as well as its negative impact on the natural environment. Other measures applied by administrators but less commonly used are the use of biodegradable, returnable packaging, the use of ecological products and informing tourists on waste-related issues.

H2 - Agritourism guesthouse administrators are concerned with capitalizing on the historical and cultural heritage of the territory;

In each county under research, there are tourist attractions that the administrators of agrotourism guesthouses are aware of and recommend for visiting. In Argeş county, monasteries, caves, lakes, museums predominate; in Braşov county, tourists can visit monasteries, Bran Castle, Poiana Braşov, ski slopes; in Dâmboviţa county, most tourist attractions are monasteries, but also the Curtea Domnească National Museum Complex, bison reserves, Ialomicioarei Cave, Bolboci Lake, sheepfolds, etc.; in Prahova county, tourists can visit Peleş Castle, monasteries, animal farms, and in Teleorman county, tourists can visit monasteries and Poiana Izvoarelor.

In the rural area, being a small community and concerned with local activities, the managers recommend for visiting the monuments and sites that make up the historical and cultural heritage of the region. Representatives of agrotourism guesthouses greatly capitalize on the „riches” of the locality (table 5).

Table 5. Actions to capitalize on heritage

			A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
County	BV	Count	50	26	1	15	0	0	92
		% of Total	17.2%	8.9%	0.3%	5.2%	0.0%	0.0%	31.6%
	PH	Count	51	17	0	11	2	2	83
		% of Total	17.5%	5.8%	0.0%	3.8%	0.7%	0.7%	28.5%
	DB	Count	57	26	4	4	3	0	94
		% of Total	19.6%	8.9%	1.4%	1.4%	1.0%	0.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
		% of Total	5.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	2	2	0	0	0	3	7
		% of Total	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	175	71	5	30	5	5	291
		% of Total	60.1%	24.4%	1.7%	10.3%	1.7%	1.7%	100.0%
Legend: A - lack of response B-brochures, leaflets, advertising, museum, informing tourists C - local events: Honoring the Heroes, Ravasitul oilor, Fundatia Ruralia D - hiking, field car rides, trips to tourist attractions, environmental protection, team building E - development of the area through collaboration with local authorities, I donate money F - knowledge of local traditional crafts									

Source: processing of authors

Table 5 reveals that the majority of respondents (60.1%) did not provide a concrete answer regarding actions to valorize heritage, which indicates a poorly exploited potential in many counties. The most popular activities reported include the use of promotional materials and informing tourists (24.4%), with a more visible involvement in Braşov (8.9%) and Dâmboviţa (8.9%) counties. Local activities such as hiking, walking or environmental protection are very limited (1.7%), while initiatives involving collaboration with local authorities or knowledge of traditional crafts are almost non-existent, being reported only sporadically in Teleorman and Prahova counties. These results highlight the need for clearer and more diverse strategies for promoting and valorizing local heritage.

H3 - The consumption of organic products is positively influenced by their own production;

Table 6 reflects the consumption of organic products from own production, divided by product types and counties. In general, Braşov (BV), Prahova (PH) and Dâmboviţa (DB) counties have a high share of organic products consumed, most of which are imported from foreign businesses (over 70% in most product categories). For example, for dairy, meat and vegetables, most of the products consumed come from imports (70.4% for dairy, 72.9% for meat and 77.7% for vegetables). However, in smaller counties, such as Argeş and Teleorman, the share of imported products is significantly lower. In Braşov county, the consumption of local organic products is more diversified, and at the level of product types, there is a trend of consuming more organic products, with a higher percentage of products of local origin (especially vegetables and fruits).

Table 6. Consumption of organic products from own production

a) Dairy						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	59	9	24	92
		% of Total	20.3%	3.1%	8.2%	31.6%
	PH	Count	75	2	6	83
		% of Total	25.8%	.7%	2.1%	28.5%
	DB	Count	60	5	29	94
		% of Total	20.6%	1.7%	10.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	8	0	7	15
		% of Total	2.7%	.0%	2.4%	5.2%
	TR	Count	3	0	4	7
		% of Total	1.0%	.0%	1.4%	2.4%
Total		Count	205	16	70	291
		% of Total	70.4%	5.5%	24.1%	100.0%
b) Meat						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	63	9	20	92
		% of Total	21.6%	3.1%	6.9%	31.6%
	PH	Count	78	2	3	83
		% of Total	26.8%	.7%	1.0%	28.5%
	DB	Count	61	9	24	94
		% of Total	21.0%	3.1%	8.2%	32.3%
	AG	Count	9	3	3	15
		% of Total	3.1%	1.0%	1.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	1	4	2	7
		% of Total	.3%	1.4%	.7%	2.4%
Total		Count	212	27	52	291
		% of Total	72.9%	9.3%	17.9%	100.0%
c) Eggs						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	57	7	28	92
		% of Total	19.6%	2.4%	9.6%	31.6%
	PH	Count	77	2	4	83
		% of Total	26.5%	.7%	1.4%	28.5%
	DB	Count	56	6	32	94
		% of Total	19.2%	2.1%	11.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	10	0	5	15
		% of Total	3.4%	.0%	1.7%	5.2%
	TR	Count	1	4	2	7
		% of Total	.3%	1.4%	.7%	2.4%

Total			Count	201	19	71	291
			% of Total	69.1%	6.5%	24.4%	100.0%
d) Vegetables							
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total	
County	BV	Count	73	8	11	92	
		% of Total	25.1%	2.7%	3.8%	31.6%	
	PH	Count	77	3	3	83	
		% of Total	26.5%	1.0%	1.0%	28.5%	
	DB	Count	64	7	23	94	
		% of Total	22.0%	2.4%	7.9%	32.3%	
	AG	Count	11	1	3	15	
		% of Total	3.8%	.3%	1.0%	5.2%	
	TR	Count	1	4	2	7	
		% of Total	.3%	1.4%	.7%	2.4%	
Total		Count	226	23	42	291	
		% of Total	77.7%	7.9%	14.4%	100.0%	
e) Fruits							
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total	
County	BV	Count	75	8	9	92	
		% of Total	25.8%	2.7%	3.1%	31.6%	
	PH	Count	76	3	4	83	
		% of Total	26.1%	1.0%	1.3%	28.5%	
	DB	Count	57	12	25	94	
		% of Total	19.6%	4.1%	8.6%	32.3%	
	AG	Count	12	1	2	15	
		% of Total	4.1%	.3%	.7%	5.2%	
	TR	Count	3	2	2	7	
		% of Total	1.0%	.7%	.7%	2.4%	
Total		Count	223	26	42	291	
		% of Total	76.6%	8.9%	14.4%	100.0%	

Source: processing of authors

To supplement the raw materials used in preparing tourists' food, administrators turn to products from the local market or from shopping centers. Thus, over 73% of the guesthouses participating in the research purchase culinary products from outside the household (table 7).

Table 7 details the consumption of organic products from local production, presenting data by counties and product categories (dairy products, meat, eggs, vegetables and fruits).

Table 7. Consumption of organic products from local production

a) dairy						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	59	9	24	92
		% of Total	20.3%	3.1%	8.2%	31.6%
	PH	Count	75	2	6	83
		% of Total	25.8%	.7%	2.1%	28.5%
	DB	Count	60	5	29	94
		% of Total	20.6%	1.7%	10.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	8	0	7	15
		% of Total	2.7%	0.0%	2.4%	5.2%
	TR	Count	3	0	4	7
		% of Total	1.0%	0.0%	1.4%	2.4%
Total		Count	205	16	70	291
		% of Total	70.4%	5.5%	24.1%	100.0%
b) meat						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	63	9	20	92
		% of Total	21.6%	3.1%	6.9%	31.6%
	PH	Count	78	2	3	83
		% of Total	26.8%	.7%	1.0%	28.5%
	DB	Count	61	9	24	94
		% of Total	21.0%	3.1%	8.2%	32.3%
	AG	Count	9	3	3	15
		% of Total	3.1%	1.0%	1.0%	5.2%
TR	Count	1	4	2	7	
	% of Total	.3%	1.4%	.7%	2.4%	
Total		Count	212	27	52	291
		% of Total	72.9%	9.3%	17.9%	100.0%
c) eggs						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	57	7	28	92
		% of Total	19.6%	2.4%	9.6%	31.6%
	PH	Count	77	2	4	83
		% of Total	26.5%	0.7%	1.4%	28.5%
	DB	Count	56	6	32	94
		% of Total	19.2%	2.1%	11.0%	32.3%
	AG	Count	10	0	5	15
		% of Total	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%	5.2%
	TR	Count	1	4	2	7
		% of Total	.3%	1.4%	0.7%	2.4%
Total		Count	201	19	71	291
		% of Total	69.1%	6.5%	24.4%	100.0%

d) vegetables						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	73	8	11	92
		% of Total	25.1%	2.7%	3.8%	31.6%
	PH	Count	77	3	3	83
		% of Total	26.5%	1.0%	1.0%	28.5%
	DB	Count	64	7	23	94
		% of Total	22.0%	2.4%	7.9%	32.3%
	AG	Count	11	1	3	15
		% of Total	3.8%	0.3%	1.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	1	4	2	7
		% of Total	0.3%	1.4%	0.7%	2.4%
Total		Count	226	23	42	291
		% of Total	77.7%	7.9%	14.4%	100.0%
e) fruits						
			Do not buy from local production	<50%	>50%	Total
County	BV	Count	75	8	9	92
		% of Total	25.8%	2.7%	3.1%	31.6%
	PH	Count	76	3	4	83
		% of Total	26.1%	1.0%	1.3%	28.5%
	DB	Count	57	12	25	94
		% of Total	19.6%	4.1%	8.6%	32.3%
	AG	Count	12	1	2	15
		% of Total	4.1%	0.3%	0.7%	5.2%
	TR	Count	3	2	2	7
		% of Total	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	2.4%
Total		Count	223	26	42	291
		% of Total	76.6%	8.9%	14.4%	0.3%

Source: processing of authors

The rural environment is characterized by a small size of space but also by the existence of a local community formed by relatives, friends, acquaintances, creating likes and dislikes. In Braşov County, most respondents do not buy dairy products, meat, eggs, vegetables or fruits from local production, with percentages of 20.3% for dairy products, 21.6% for meat, 19.6% for eggs, 25.1% for vegetables and 25.8% for fruits.

In Prahova County, most respondents do not buy dairy products, meat, eggs, vegetables or fruits from local production. The percentages are 25.8% for dairy products, 26.8% for meat, 26.5% for eggs, 26.5% for vegetables and 26.1% for fruits.

Dâmboviţa County stands out for a significant percentage of respondents who buy locally produced products.

In Argeş County, the percentage of respondents who buy locally produced products is the lowest. Only 2.4% buy locally produced dairy products in a proportion of more than 50%. Fruits are purchased locally produced in a proportion of more than 50% by 0.7% of respondents.

In Teleorman County, the percentages for purchasing locally produced products are also low. 1.4% of respondents buy dairy products in a proportion of more than 50%, 0.7% buy meat, 0.7% buy eggs, 0.7% buy vegetables and 0.7% buy locally produced fruits. These percentages reflect a minimal tendency to purchase local products compared to the other counties.

In conclusion, Dâmbovița County stands out for a significant purchase of locally produced products in most categories, while Argeș County and Teleorman County present the lowest percentages for local products, indicating a lower preference for locally produced products compared to other counties.

H4 - Promoting environmental awareness, recommending visitors to protect the environment, using eco-design of buildings, knowing about certified ecological products and obtaining eco-labels determines an increase in ecological and sustainable behavior among the community.

With an overall score of 4.50, the administrators of agrotourism guesthouses demonstrate that they have knowledge about the environment. All administrators in Teleorman County and 47% of those in Dâmbovița County know aspects related to the protection of forests, vegetation, atmosphere, water, fauna as well as protected areas and natural monuments (table 8).

Table 8. The degree of knowledge of the concept of environmental protection

Items	Score
Knowledge of the environment	4.50
Recommend visitors to protect the environment	4.55
Use of eco-design of buildings	3.34

Source: processing of authors

When we talk about the environment, it is necessary to bring into discussion the term „sustainable development” which aims to improve people’s lives and provide a clean natural environment for future generations through efficient environmental management.

In the top of administrators who recommend tourists to protect the environment is Teleorman County (100%), followed by Argeș (86%), Prahova (69%), Brașov (63%) and Dâmbovița (59%). The overall score is 4.55.

H5 - There is a positive association between administrators’ concern for the use of strategies/policies in the field of activity organization and an increase in the number of accommodation nights.

Table 9 highlights the measures for facilitating tourist travel in each county. In Brașov County, the most frequent responses are concentrated in the no response category with 49 cases (16.8% of the total). Regarding infrastructure and resources, minibuses, ATVs, off-road vehicles and car rentals are mentioned by 18 respondents (6.2%), and for the rehabilitation of access roads, 12 cases (4.1%) are mentioned.

Table 9. Measures to facilitate the travel of tourists

			A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
County	BV	Count	49	18	7	12	1	5	92
		% of Total	16.8%	6.2%	2.4%	4.1%	0.3%	1.7%	31.6%
	PH	Count	54	17	0	6	0	6	83
		% of Total	18.6%	5.8%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	2.1%	28.5%
	DB	Count	61	9	6	8	0	10	94
		% of Total	21.0%	3.1%	2.1%	2.7%	0.0%	3.4%	32.3%
	AG	Count	11	0	0	4	0	0	15
		% of Total	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%
	TR	Count	0	2	0	5	0	0	7
		% of Total	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	175	46	13	35	1	21	291
		% of Total	60.1%	15.8%	4.5%	12.0%	0.3%	7.2%	100.0%
Legend: A - lack of response B - microbus, ATV, land cars, carriage, car rental, partnerships transport companies C-alley, parking, private road, rehabilitation access road D - alley ramp E – elevator F - map, indicators, information, posters, internet, qualified personnel									

Source: processing of authors

In Teleorman County, the lack of response is not represented (0%). Microbuses and ATVs are mentioned only by 2 respondents (0.7%), and the rehabilitation of access roads by 5 respondents (1.7%). The other options, including the access ramp, the elevator and the map, the signs and

Taking into account the aforementioned, the administrators of agrotourism guesthouses create, to a large extent, special offers aimed at people with modest incomes (table 10); moreover, from the discussions held with the representatives we conclude that they expressly address these people and less to very wealthy tourists (few in number).

Table 10. Creating offers for people with modest incomes

			lack of answer	in a very small measure	in small measure	neither, nor	in big measure	Total
County	BV	Count	10	11	22	10	39	92
		% of Total	3.4%	3.8%	7.6%	3.4%	13.4%	31.6%
	PH	Count	25	9	9	6	34	83
		% of Total	8.6%	3.1%	3.1%	2.1%	11.7%	28.5%
	DB	Count	18	10	26	17	23	94
		% of Total	6.2%	3.4%	8.9%	5.8%	7.9%	32.3%
	AG	Count	0	1	1	7	6	15
		% of Total	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	2.4%	2.1%	5.2%
	TR	Count	1	2	0	4	0	7
		% of Total	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	54	33	58	44	102	291
		% of Total	18.6%	11.3%	19.9%	15.1%	35.1%	100.0%

Source: processing of authors

In Braşov County, guesthouse administrators largely consider that there are offers for people with modest incomes, with a percentage of 13.4% in this category. 11.7% of guesthouse administrators in Prahova County consider that the offers for people with modest incomes are adequate to a large extent. In Argeş County, guesthouse administrators provided the lowest ratings in all categories, with the lowest percentage of largely positive responses (2.1%). In conclusion, Braşov County and Prahova County have the highest percentages of largely positive responses, indicating a relatively positive perception by guesthouse administrators of the offers for people with modest incomes. The number of overnight stays over the last three years is important to analyze because it provides a clear picture of tourism trends and the attractiveness of the destination. By analyzing these results, the impact of different marketing and promotional strategies can be assessed, and adjustments can be made to improve the offer and services. This information is also important for resource planning and the development of tourism infrastructure, contributing to more efficient business management in the field (table 11).

Table 11. Number of nights in the last three years

			increasing	stagnation	decreasing	Total
County	BV	Count	48	20	24	92
		% of Total	16.5%	6.9%	8.2%	31.6%
	PH	Count	34	31	18	83
		% of Total	11.7%	10.7%	6.2%	28.5%
	DB	Count	43	40	11	94
		% of Total	14.8%	13.7%	3.8%	32.3%
	AG	Count	9	1	5	15
		% of Total	3.1%	.3%	1.7%	5.2%
	TR	Count	4	3	0	7
		% of Total	1.4%	1.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Total		Count	138	95	58	291
		% of Total	47.4%	32.6%	19.9%	100.0%

Source: processing of authors

In Brasov County, 16.5% of respondents believe that activity is growing, which suggests a positive perception on development and expansion in this county. This suggests a favorable general perception of development and expansion in this county, perhaps indicating a positive atmosphere and development opportunities for local hostels. In Prahova County, 11.7% of respondents notice an increase in activity, but with a percentage of more than 10.7% considering that the activity is stagnating. This suggests that while there is an appreciation for growth, a significant portion of administrators feel that no significant changes are made, and a small 6.2% perceive a decrease in activity. Prahova County has a more balanced profile between growth and stagnation compared to other counties.

Results and discussion

A number of important details for further investigation are disclosed after the data gathered from the 291 agro-tourism boarding houses that served as the collective subject of this study's analysis.

In comparison to earlier times, we have witnessed the enhancement and diversification of the range of services provided by agri-tourist pensions, along with a rise in the need to reduce water and energy usage and discover substitutes. Furthermore, a low level of education and lack of interest in selective garbage collection is evidenced by the small proportion of managers surveyed who had contracts with sanitation businesses. The view is further supported by managers' inaction when it comes to suggesting methods for garbage sorting..

Managers of agro-tourism pensions place a high value on employing low-impact processes in agricultural production. These procedures mostly involve lowering waste generation and recycling trash into secondary raw materials or energy sources through burning or other techniques. It is observed that the use of organic products and biodegradable packaging is trending. The management of agrotourism hostels prioritize

maintaining a clean environment over disposing of natural trash, so they make available to guests modes of transportation like bicycles, carts, and sleighs.

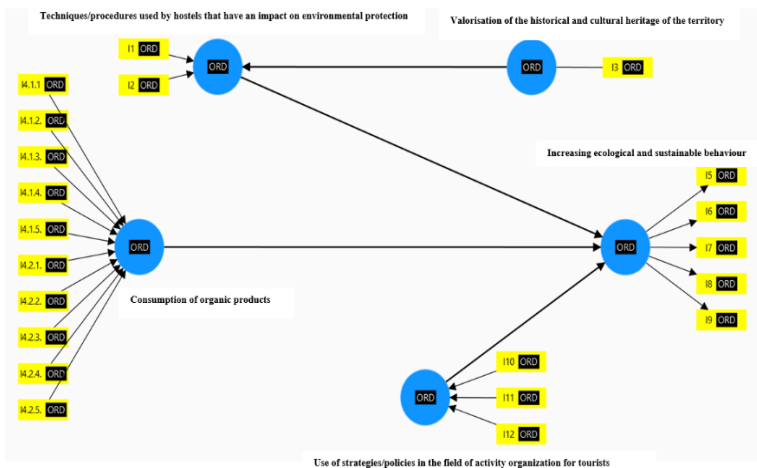
The agro-tourist pensions' representatives work to preserve the history by organizing events, distributing pamphlets and brochures to visitors, organizing hikes and excursions to nearby tourist destinations, and encouraging visitors to participate in traditional local crafts.

The degree to which agrotourism prepares food using its own and local produce directly relates to how sustainable it is.

Structural model - sustainability of agrotourism in Romania

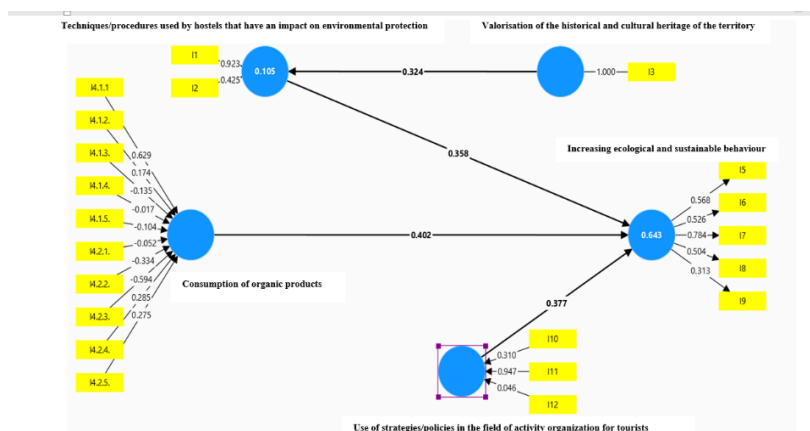
Analysing the relationships between latent variables related to the use of organic products and the ecological and sustainable behavior of tourists is important to better understand consumer behavior and develop marketing strategies and policies that encourage ecological practices. To carry out this analysis, Smart PLS (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling) was used and the assumptions made previously, based on the literature and the results of the study, were taken into account. The model presented in Figure 1 is a partial structural equation model (PLS-SEM) developed using SmartPLS software. The model is designed to analyze the relationships between various latent variables related to the use of green products and the green and sustainable behavior of tourists.

Figure 1: Structural model



Source: processing authors

Smart PLS results highlight causal relationships and statistical significance between latent variables. They demonstrate the reliability and validity of the constructs. These results of the structural model are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Results of the structural model

Source: processing authors

❖ Description and interpretation of the model

The model includes the following latent (construct) variables:

1. Techniques/procedures used by hostels that have an impact on environmental protection (Techniques/Procedures): I1, I2 (indicators)
2. Valorisation of the historical and cultural heritage of the territory (Institrimony Valorisation): I3 (indicator)
3. Consumption of organic products (Environmental consumption): I4.1.1, I4.1.2, I4.1.3, I4.1.4, I4.1.5, I4.1.6, I4.2.1, I4.2.2, I4.2.4, I4.2.5 (indicators)
4. Increasing ecological and sustainable behaviour (Eco-Behavior): I5, I6, I7, I8, I9 (indicators)
5. Use of strategies/policies in the field of activity organization for tourists (Strategies/policies): I10, I11, I12 (indicators)

❖ Relationships and track coefficients

- Techniques/Procedures Ecological consumption (0.105): This suggests that the techniques and procedures used by hostels for environmental protection have a positive but modest impact on the consumption of organic products.
- Ecological behaviour (0.324): The valorisation of historical and cultural heritage contributes significantly to the growth of ecological and sustainable behaviour.
- Ecological Behavior (0.358): There is a positive and significant relationship between the consumption of organic products and the ecological behavior.
- Strategy/policy (0.402): This indicates that a high consumption of organic

products positively influences the use of strategies and policies in the organization of activities for tourists.

- Strategy/policies <TAG1> Ecological behaviour (0.377): The use of tourism strategies and policies has a significant impact on the growth of the environmental and sustainable behaviour

❖ R-Squared

- $R^2 = 0.105$): About 10.5% of the variation in the consumption of organic products is explained by the model.
- ($R^2 = 0.643$): About 64.3% of the variation in ecological and sustainable behavior is explained by the model, which suggests a fairly strong model.
- 2 Strategies/policies (R^2 is not mentioned, but probably around the average, because it is significantly influenced by the consumption of organic products).

The model suggests that there is an important relationship between the valorisation of cultural heritage and the ecological behaviour of tourists. Consumption of organic products also plays a central role in this model, directly and indirectly influencing environmental behaviour through strategies and policies applied in tourism.

The use of ecological products and the adoption of ecological strategies in tourism are necessary to promote sustainable behavior. The model emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural and ecological aspects in the tourism industry to stimulate sustainable behaviors.

This model can be useful for tourism managers and local authorities, providing a framework for the development of sustainable policies and practices that promote the consumption of ecological products and environmental protection.

Conclusions

In Romania, agritourism is an important element of rural space and has a strong impact on village life. Therefore, an efficient management of agritourism is particularly important, which capitalizes on the advantages offered by the rural environment and associates them with services (difficult to develop in other forms of tourism), increasing the chances of local partnerships.

According to the research hypotheses, implementing sustainable practices can offer guesthouse managers numerous advantages. Adopting green techniques, such as reducing water and energy consumption and efficient waste management (H1), allows managers to significantly reduce the operational costs of guesthouses. This economic efficiency contributes to increasing long-term financial sustainability. Capitalizing on the historical and cultural heritage of the region (H2) and promoting eco-friendly products (H3) increase the attractiveness of guesthouses for tourists interested in authentic and sustainable experiences. This contributes to strengthening a positive

reputation, which attracts a larger number of customers and stimulates their loyalty. Offering eco-friendly products of own production and obtaining eco-certifications (H3, H4) allow managers to access a market segment willing to pay a premium for sustainable services and high-quality products. Implementing sustainable strategies and policies (H5) and promoting environmentally friendly behavior not only improves the tourist experience, but also contributes to increasing their loyalty. Satisfied tourists tend to return and recommend the guesthouse, which stimulates the increase in the number of overnight stays and, implicitly, revenues. Promoting guesthouses as eco-friendly and environmentally responsible destinations offers a significant competitive advantage in an increasingly sustainability-oriented market. This positioning can attract support from local communities and facilitate access to funds or subsidies dedicated to sustainable tourism.

Increasing the efficacy of sustainable agritourism management can support sustainable development and the elimination of social and economic poverty on a larger and more comprehensive scale. In order to achieve sustainable development, managers of sustainable agrotourism must engage in a collective logic around group objectives, such as: protecting and maintaining habitat, species, and associated ecosystems; preventing and eliminating improper agricultural practices; creating and maintaining socio-cultural practices and manifestations; providing tourists with leisure equipment; monitoring the well-being of the local community.

Making sustainable agritourism management more efficient can contribute to a broader and denser extent to sustainable development and to the eradication of social and economic poverty. The research underlines the relevance of sustainable tourism as a solution applicable to all forms of tourism, emphasizing the economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities, and agritourism is presented as a viable alternative that capitalizes on the rural environment, organic agricultural products and authentic contact with nature, thus offering a concrete perspective on sustainability by analyzing the consumption of own agricultural production in guesthouses in counties representative of Romanian agritourism.

During the research, we encountered numerous difficulties that made our work difficult: the lack of information and statistical data on the website of the National Institute of Territorial Statistics regarding the specific number of agrotourism guesthouses for the five counties (Braşov, Dâmboviţa, Prahova, Argeş, Teleorman).

The paper brings superior elements in relation to other researchers through its detailed focus on agritourism in Romania, specifically analyzing the share of consumption of own agricultural products in agritourism guesthouses. Unlike other studies that deal with sustainable tourism in a more general way, this research emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural and ecological aspects in agritourism practice. Another innovative element consists in identifying a direct association between hostel managers' concern for the use of sustainable strategies and the increase in the number of accommodation nights, thus providing a framework of values for the development of public policies.

We intend to continue the current research by analyzing trends in creating niches, very tight customer segments, and practicing an elite of destinations, products, territories, and customers, and developing viable strategies for sustainable agritourism management.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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