

AGRO-TOURISM AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Agriculture is the fundamental sector that has played a strategic role since the beginning of humanity. Tourism sector is a sector that contributes to the national economy with its features of increasing foreign exchange income and providing employment, provides cultural and social communication at the international level and has a great share in the preservation of world peace with its integrative effect. Agro tourism - a type of rural tourism applied in a rural environment where all tourism opportunities and agricultural tourist houses are used and is one of the most effective ways of evaluating the existing local resources in a rural environment. Therefore, it is based on the principles of sustainability in both economic and agricultural terms.

Today, most farmers no longer produce only agricultural products. In recent years, perhaps due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, new tourism options have been added to the list for people longing for nature and natural life. Service providers in agriculture and tourism should cooperate to meet guest expectations. In this study, the evaluation of literature information on the subject and economic sustainability principles were examined, starting from the basic point of agro-tourism.

Keywords: Agricultural sustainability, Agrotourism management, Finance, Rural development, Tourism business.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and tourism, both in economic and multidisciplinary terms, complement each other in terms of their common characteristics. Activities in the two basic elements of agriculture and tourism represent an alternative for the diversification of agriculture in rural areas, rural planning and sustainable development. The fact that agro-tourism is included in the development plans of countries and supported by governments is an indication of the importance given to agro-tourism. Agricultural tourism, which acts with the idea of using the environment and natural resources by protecting them, covers and provides benefits in many basic activities within the scope of sustainability, in addition to the business opportunities it offers.

The irreversible damage to environment besides natural resources has brought the concept of sustainable agriculture to the forefront. Agricultural production is faced with price fluctuations and climate change. Farmers find the only solution to cope with such problems and increase their income in modern agricultural technology applications that they apply using both chemicals and machines (Songkhla and Somboonsuke, 2012). Another reason for the preference of rural tourism is the desire to live a nostalgic lifestyle in a peaceful environment with cultural interaction and

emotional experiences (Puška et al., 2021). If the activities are largely dependent on agriculture, rural tourism can be called agricultural tourism (agritourism) or farm tourism. Agricultural tourism means combining agriculture and tourism, and both contribute to each other (Commission Européenne, 2000; Faganel, 2011). Alternative tourism emphasizes local character and offers quality services and products by providing personal communication and authentic experiences between tourists and service providers (Kizos and Losifides, 2007). The development of education activities of the people who lives at the rural areas has accelerated the process of using modern agricultural techniques in farm enterprises and entering into new methods and searches for additional income to be provided to farms. It can be said that these searches are among the reasons for the formation of farm tourism (Andereck and Vogt, 2000; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Bwana et al., 2015). Despite its decreasing importance in terms of economy and labor market worldwide, agriculture still plays a central role as a sustainable approach among the current differentiated development paths of rural areas (Pugliese, 2001). Agro tourism activities are important in terms of providing new awareness of the areas visited, ensuring respect for other areas or the world outside the tourist's lived world, the environment and cultural values (Lopez and Garcia, 2006). Diversification of institutional portfolios on farms through agro-tourism helps to increase agricultural incomes and alleviate the economic problems of family farms (Barbieri, 2013). Farm tourism is kind of the tourism carried out by the farmers and also by farm owners over the agricultural and garden areas, that is traditional methods are used to produce animals and plants (George and Rilla, 2005). Scientists emphasize that tourist motivations for visiting destinations have changed dramatically and that new tourists are interested in more specific things and curious activities within the quality experience of tourist products and services (Zoto et al., 2013). It is stated that farm tourism is one of the oldest forms of rural tourism and emerged after World War II (Nilsson, 2002). The interest in rural areas in the world is increasing and among the alternative tourism activities other than mass tourism, there are also farm (Agro) tourism and agricultural (Agri) tourism among the tourism types that stand out with their sustainability dimension. Agricultural tourism, which consists of a wide range of development, is the livelihood of local people and also cooperation by local stakeholders is essential for successful agricultural tourism (Triani and Bangun, 2025).

It is possible to reduce seasonal unemployment and idle capacity, which occur as a result of the weak labor mobility in the agricultural sector and the fact that production is mostly dependent on the seasons, by the employment opportunities created from tourism. The potential effects of agro-tourism are stated as increasing the income of local farmers, developing entrepreneurial skills and diversifying traditional food products within the district, and it is argued that agro-tourism will reduce the migration of young people from rural to urban areas as it will create employment opportunities and provides incentives for protection of agricultural lands, and the programs for agro-tourism can help to protection of historical, cultural and natural resources of societies, create community pride and increase the quality of life of local communities. It is important to conduct research on creating a roadmap for entrepreneurs who aim to operate in an innovative business field and clarifying the elements that will play a critical role in the success of the established initiative. The results of this study are especially intended to contribute to sustainable development goals, poverty reduction, rural development and agricultural sustainability.

2. AGRO-TOURISM AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Although agrotourism has been mentioned as a concept since the 1990s, sustainable tourism, which has been the subject of research since the 1980s, requires the inclusion of sustainability principles in

every type of tourism (Hirotsune, 2011; Zolfani et al., 2015). Agricultural based tourism activities has seen by developmental period in Italy during 1980s. Activities of tourism continue over many farms. Agricultural tourism activities are supported and encouraged by Italian Government (OECD, 2005). Agrotourism is defined; a type of commercial type enterprise which provides an additional income to the business owners and serves as an agricultural plant house, farm or farmhouse for the entertainment of visitors (Bernardo et al., 2004). Many farmers have turned to agrotourism to provide additional income and opportunities from their normal agricultural activities (Privitera, 2010). Agrotourism is also type of tourism that is based on recognition of agricultural activities and products in the target region, and rural recreation activities during this time. Agrotourism consists of agricultural, ecological and cultural products (Joshi et al., 2011). Definition of “United Nations World Tourism Organization”, the places where rural tourism takes place are places with low population density, rural areas covering landscapes besides usage of lands, forestry, agriculture, traditional typed social structures and lifestyle (UNWTO, 2020).

It is possible to address sustainable agriculture in different basic dimensions such as financial sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability (Roe et al., 2013; Afteni et al., 2021; Kusumawardhani et al., 2023). Rural areas become mysterious and attractive destinations for tourists due to their different cultural, historical, ethnic and geographical characteristics (Wilson et al., 2001). WWOOF (WWOOF Independents-World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), one of the most important international organizations of agriculture and farm tourism in the world, is an education and cultural exchange program based on mutual trust and respect. Any farm, community or garden project that wants to participate in cultural and educational exchange and uses organic methods can participate in this program (WWOOF, 2017). Through these multiple activities carried out in agrotourism, it is aimed to improve income and living conditions by generating non-agricultural income and thus social and economic development in all areas (Aikaterini et al., 2001).

In other words, agrotourism can be defined as a type of tourism that allows tourists to gain direct and indirect experience in farms where agricultural activities are carried out. It is also an intertwined form of agriculture and tourism (Phillip et al., 2010). Agrotourism activities contribute to the solution of problems that concern the local community such as preventing the decrease in population structure in rural areas, fulfilling public services or correcting deficiencies (Sharpley, 2002). Agrotourism, which is compatible with environmental, social and communal values, contributes to the economic activation of rural areas without creating pressure on natural and human resources (Aikaterini et al., 2001). Agrotourism is in relation with many disciplines due to its structural characteristics. This multidisciplinary feature of agrotourism is described by Sznajder et al. (2009) stated as follows: Agronomy, zoology, geography, economy, ethnography, statistics and others. Agro tourism covers a wide range of activities such as programming various events likewise festivals and parties on the farms, food services and accommodations, selling souvenirs, fishing and hunting by a fee, staying on farms, picking fruits and vegetables, watching nature, entertainment and educational tours, visiting for facilities of farm and voluntary typed participations to agricultural activities, visiting to recreational areas, outdoor sports and hiking trails, riding on horseback, visiting to the businesses produce on local product, participate to local based cultural several events, visiting to the local based monuments and also for the demonstrations by homemade based recipes (jams, cakes, pasta, etc.) (Kizos and Losifides, 2007; Barbieri, 2013). Although they vary by country, agrotourism activities are classified as special activities and festivals (music festivals, harvest festivals, weddings, etc.), recreational activities (bird watching, animal feeding, mountain climbing, fishing, etc.), farm activities (farm visits, agricultural exhibitions,

accommodation on farms, tree rental, etc.) and trainings (organic product cultivation, farm schools, agricultural education programs, etc.) (McCullough et al., 2007; Allali et al., 2025). Activities that can be evaluated within the scope of agrotourism include various festivals, seasonal activities, youth camps, bird watching, horse riding, animal feeding, wildlife observation, wine making, camping, planting, irrigation, care and harvesting of agricultural products (Maetzold, 2002; McCullough et al., 2008; Doruk Kahraman and Kahraman, 2023).

In order for businesses that engage in agro-tourism activities to be successful and ensure sustainability, they must meet certain conditions. These conditions can be listed as follows (Walker, 2009): Creating a plan, planning to expand activities, determining responsibilities, developing partnerships, creating an inventory of attractions, visiting other agro-tourism farms, adding a web page to tourism sites, determining a customer profile, and establishing clear rules for visitors. According to 2013 data, tourism, which has become the third largest economic activity in European Union countries (Husting, 2013), has also been defined by the United Nations as one of the ten most effective sectors in creating a green economy. In particular, in Europe and North America, agro-tourism is used as a policy tool to rejuvenate and protect rural communities and regional economies, and in many countries, this type of tourism is considered one of the main sources for promoting the economy in rural areas (Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Cichowska and Klimek, 2011). In America, where tourism is considered the 3rd largest industry, great importance is given to the researches based on the rural areas of America to develop and revitalize tourism (Honadle, 1990). In England, farm life is promoted and live broadcasts are made on the “Our Welsh Farm” website to encourage farm life and tourism (Our Welsh Farm, 2022). Local people living in rural areas, existing infrastructure and resources are included in the services offered to tourists (Puška et al., 2021). According to a researcher (Hatch, 2008), the stages of the process for agrotourism businesses are determined as; conducting market analysis, evaluating financial resources, marketing the enterprise, personality assessment, defining goals, evaluating land resources, determining time and labor needs, defining security conditions, obtaining legal support, determining insurance options and developing a business plan.

These new approaches, which also turn rural areas into tourism destinations, enable tourism to be evaluated as a catalyst for rural socio-economic development and transformation (Sharpley, 2002). There are also views that rural tourism, although it includes agricultural or farm tourism, is broader and includes ecotourism and other nature-based tourism types, or cultural tourism, although not directly related to agriculture (Weaver and Fennell, 1997; Wilson et al., 2001). Tourism is an economic resource in rural areas (Epuran et al., 2021). According to WTO data, tourism is an industry that generates 622 billion dollars of income, benefits from the activities of 763 million people, and provides employment for approximately 200 million people. Despite the crises and wars experienced globally, it is one of the fastest growing sectors in the last 60 years (WTO, 2016). Tourism has become an extremely broad, multifaceted and complex phenomenon today. These suggestions, which are generally made for rural tourism, should also be taken into consideration for the development of agrotourism. With these suggested items, UNWTO aims to make strategic plans for the development of rural areas, to build a fair, inclusive, durable and sustainable agrotourism sector, to use technology and innovations, to create a value chain and to develop agrotourism experiences (UNWTO, 2020). Agrotourism is a type of tourism products that is directly related to agricultural based environment - products and accommodations on the agricultural areas (Sharpley and Roberts, 2004). Agrotourism generally includes all types of tourism. It is carried out in natural areas, in settlements with low population density, in areas where agriculture, forestry and traditional

activities are associated with tourism (Blangy and Vautier, 2001). Rural tourism is an important type in terms of giving priority to local people, restoring existing farm environments and bringing them into tourism, and thus contributing to the welfare of local people (Johnson et al., 2011).

Parents are thinking of equipping their children with basic life skills including agriculture and farming so that they can survive the unprecedented challenges of life, and the demand for agro-tourism, where people can learn simple lifestyles, plant growing, gardening and understanding the environment around them, will increase in the future (Samarathunga and Gamage, 2024). It can be said that agro-tourism became wider for almost last 20 years. Many factors have contributed to this trend. Examples of these are people going on shorter vacations, traveling more by car, combining business trips with vacations, turning to different types of tourism, and their desire to search for their roots by traveling with their families (Maetzold, 2004). Tourism can be used as a tool for the improvement of degraded areas in rural areas. It is seen that tourism strengthens the interaction of local culture with the environment (Hall, 2004).

Agrotourism has become a growing focus of attention today due to the reasons such as preserving the balance of ecology, sustainability of using resources, protecting cultural, natural, social diversity and ethnographic resources, encouraging the development for communication fundamental, public services, etc., and contributing to economic based developments on the rural settlements (Dorobantu and Maricica, 2012). Due to the basic sustainability reasons mentioned above, it is important that studies on the subject increase. Today, agrotourism continues to be an opportunity for farmers and businesses to increase their income on a national scale. Some producers, state and federal government institutions, universities, tourism offices, professional consultants and the media allocate resources to the promotion of agrotourism as an industry (Bruch and Holland, 2004). Agrotourism emphasizes environmental benefits such as protecting natural habitats, ecosystems and water resources, minimizing environmental damage and developing infrastructure in rural areas (Valdivia and Babieri, 2014). It has been concluded that agrotourism activities can be a driving force for the sustainable development of society and the benefits of agrotourism are listed as developing the social based empowerment system, strengthening of social link, development of social based skills besides relationships, enhancing of incomes of local communities, diversify and intensify of the economic based activities, opportunities for job and combat with poverty (Hamzah et al., 2012). Based on the definition, mission and characteristics outlined by WWOOF, it is known that there are a total of 721 organic agricultural farms in 84 different countries in the world. Among these countries, Finland, Slovenia, Kenya, Russia, Morocco, Malaysia, Croatia and Indonesia stand out as the countries with the most organic farms, respectively (WWOOF, 2019a; b). According to many researchers, agrotourism is seen as a solution to the problems in rural areas (Marandola et al., 2006; Shaffril et al., 2014; Litianingsih et al., 2025). Generally speaking, agrotourism is a practice aimed at attracting the attention of visitors and tourists in an area used primarily for agricultural purposes (Blacka et al., 2009).

The two fastest growing factors of the continuously developing world economy are agriculture and tourism (Bhandare and Potdar, 2014). Since agrotourism pays for itself in a short time, investment examples at an international level are also striking (Sznajder et al., 2009). The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2016) estimates that 1.8 billion tourists will visit tourist destinations around the world by 2030. The development of such activities in rural areas also indirectly provides economic gain for those who provide services in these areas (Wilson et al., 2001). Agriculture and tourism, as a two-factor sector, can develop economically underdeveloped areas and help many sectors develop. The types of tourism developing in rural areas cause diversification in the level of

local industrialization and cause job diversity in the areas (Kunasekaran et al., 2012). It has been stated that such activities will encourage the protection of agricultural resources and that local agricultural resources will gain value (Songkhla and Somboonsuke, 2012). The most important advantage of agricultural tourism is that it subcontracts to other regions, which ensures that the income remains in the same region. The prominent features of agricultural tourism are as follows (Dorobantu and Fieldsend, 2011).

Today, due to reasons such as accelerating industrialization, developments in agricultural technologies, and the decline in income from traditional rural sectors, there has been a need for economic diversification and the search for alternative sources of income in rural areas. Changing demands in all sectors, developments in transportation and communication require changes in supply, and it is extremely essential to base innovations on sustainability. Agro tourism is an important element of tourism that is sensitive to the environment and society. These activities carried out for the purpose of nutrition have maintained their existence and importance since the existence of humanity. The fast development on communication and information technologies, improvement for infrastructure opportunities, changes in free time spending patterns and the need to get away from city stress are among the factors affecting the development of the agro tourism industry. Agro tourism is kind of a softer type of tourism applied for development in sustainable tourism in rural areas and also serves as farm tourism. Agro tourism, which is included in rural based tourism practices, it is also important model of tourism that can be evaluated within the scope of sustainability and can contribute directly and indirectly to rural development. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on it and carry out the necessary promotion-education-diversification studies.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Agrotourism is known as kind of rural tourism relative with agriculture and also usually noted as components of rural based tourism activities concept conceptually and serves for sustainability. Today, in addition to alternative searches in rural areas, changes in the consumption habits of individuals have led to new searches in the tourism sector. Considering the concept of sustainability, suggestions should be developed that will both enable local people to produce more efficient agricultural products and to evaluate this production better. It is observed that the rural population is gradually decreasing in most developing countries and that the areas that have lost or damaged agricultural productivity are increasing. This situation primarily causes the rural society to become poorer, while causing problems such as deforestation, erosion and loss of productivity due to improper use of resources. With the acceleration of the phenomenon of globalization worldwide, the level of development between countries has become increasingly evident. Increasing productivity in agriculture and providing formations that will provide income to local people such as agrotourism in rural areas will contribute to the rural people continuing their economic existence, continuing their lives in their own living spaces and thus preventing migration waves.

Agrotourism is compatible with tourism on the basis of sustainability in terms of agriculture as well as economy due to the basic objectives such as continuity of production, protection of existing areas, protection-preservation and production of local genotypes, and transfer to future generations. Suggestions should be made on how renewable energy can be used in both agriculture and tourism. In carrying out agrotourism-related activities, it is essential to take into account the risks of a number of ethical violations, to ensure that guests adapt to the regional culture, and to ensure that information, education and security are provided in order to advance the regional culture without damaging the existing structure.

4. REFERENCES

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