
Agritourism projects in relation with social, economic, cultural and natural environments

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of agritourism leads us to consider three dimensions which constitute the essence of the concept of agritourism: a nature-based economy; an educational and social component; a need for environmental sustainability. Thus, agritourism is a real opportunity in several ways for the majority of countries in the world. It is a means of economically enhancing biodiversity, thus generating significant additional income in the fight against poverty, and involving local populations in a relevant and sustainable management of resources by tending to reduce the impact on the environment. It is in this context that this study is oriented; to discuss the three aspects in relation to agritourism projects.

Keywords: *Social aspect, economic aspect, cultural aspect.*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s, tourism has been the fastest growing industry in the world. With the emergence of new social and environmental concerns, it is increasingly confronted with the question of its compatibility with the development of local communities and the protection of the environment. The idea of sustainable development is a challenge, an urgent call to explore ways that would allow us to achieve it. Among the panoply of tools proposed in order to evolve towards a sustainable development of our societies, there is one which is now attracting attention: agritourism.

Agritourism is therefore often seen as a miracle solution capable of reconciling economic development, environmental protection and the well-being of communities. Indeed, the concept of agritourism appeared in the 1980s following the general awareness of the environmental impacts of human activities. One of the first definitions is that of Tessougue and Coulibaly which speaks of a "form of tourism which consists in visiting relatively intact or little disturbed natural areas, in order to study and admire the landscape, the plants and the wild animals that it shelters, as well as all cultural manifestation observable in these areas".

Agritourism is also considered as an approach for the development of sustainable and responsible tourism in regions often marked by the fragility of their ecosystems and their socio-economic organizations. It is a form of alternative tourism centered on the discovery of nature. It favors the observation, interpretation, education and study of natural environments. We go not only to discover the landscapes, fauna and flora of a region but also that of its inhabitants. Agritourism aims to make both travelers and local populations aware of the need to preserve the environment.

Definition

According to Clarke [1], agritourism is a form of sustainable tourism that contributes to the three pillars of sustainable development and also involves the active participation of local populations and tourists in actions to safeguard and/or education to safeguard biodiversity (reforestation, protection flora and fauna, reintroduction of endangered species, etc.). Several definitions are regularly cited in the literature

The impacts generated by agritourism

By virtue of its specific characteristics, agritourism should be accompanied by positive repercussions on the natural and socio-cultural environment. Under these conditions, the measurement of the economic, ecological, and social costs and benefits of agritourism is different from that of traditional or mass tourism. The usual ratios, particularly in terms of economic profitability, must be able to be appreciated in a different context that assesses the repercussions of the agritourism activity not only in terms of financial profitability but perhaps above all in terms of impact on the environment. Income, activity, and social conditions of local populations [2] and [3].

With the rapid growth of agritourism internationally, we are increasingly aware of the impacts of this activity. Of course, these will depend on how we define this form of tourism.

Environmental impacts

Tourism is often seen as responsible for the degradation of the natural environment. Measuring the ecological costs and benefits of tourism projects is therefore one of the major challenges of agritourism. Indeed, agritourism represents one of the rare forms of tourism development that, under certain conditions, can promote the protection of natural areas thanks to the conservation programs that it generates and that it can finance [2, 3].

The UNWTO has defined three composite indicators which are particularly well suited to measuring the ecological costs and benefits of agritourism. It is:

- **Carrying capacity indicator:** This composite measurement tool makes it possible to determine the maximum number of tourists per site, taking into account the intensity of use during peak periods. This indicator can be calculated from the protection indices of natural sites and makes it possible to give the alert on the capacity of the site to withstand different levels of agritourism frequentation.

- **Site disturbance indicator:** This tool makes it possible to carry out a composite measurement of the levels of impact on the site, taking into account the natural and ecological characteristics. It is a question of answering the question of knowing to what extent agritourism despite all the precautions taken vis-à-vis the natural environment nevertheless has a negative impact on the environment and which one. This should make it possible to indicate what measures to take depending on the degree of disturbance of the sites used by agritourism.

- **Indicator of ecological interest:** This tool should make it possible to measure the ecological peculiarities of the site which make it attractive for agritourism and which may change over time and with tourist frequentation. It is mainly a qualitative indicator which plays a very important role in ensuring the sustainability of investments linked to the development of agritourism[2,3].

The advantage of these different indicators is that they make it possible to ensure a real ecological monitoring of agritourism products and also make it possible to have a global vision of the different products created in the same geographical area by several operators [2,3].

Economic impacts

With its emphasis on individual or small group travel, it would be utopian to believe that agritourism could breathe new life into the economy of a struggling country. However, we can recognize the great potential of this activity to improve the local economy.

Among the benefits of the agritourism industry, job creation for people in communities is often mentioned and is generally used as a basic indicator. However, although often jobs are actually created, they are mostly secondary, underpaid and seasonal jobs. Elysée et al. demonstrated this in a study on the creation of the Saguenay Park in Quebec, when the best jobs were held by workers from urban centers outside the communities. In any agritourism project, the economic benefits can be of particular importance for local populations.

However, the examples show that these advantages only gain consistency after many years. Case studies also show that in the short term, agritourism revenues are modest and not sufficient to finance the environmental protection required to provide high quality agritourism products [2,3]. They further reveal that it is very difficult to ensure the distribution of financial benefits between private and public sector actors [2,3].

Thus, the economic impacts of agritourism are not always substantial and may not even be positive at all [4]. Several countries have chosen to turn to agritourism in order to contribute to the economic development of communities living in regions often untouched by more traditional development efforts due to their remoteness from large urban centers [5]. We must not forget that the contribution of agritourism to the local economy does not depend only on the money that enters the region but also and above all on the part of this money that will remain there.

In sum, agritourism has the potential to improve the economy of local communities or help finance ongoing activities within protected areas, but the question remains to what extent this goal can be achieved. Actually achieved.

Sociocultural impacts

Harkat et al. [6] underline that in order to assess these socio-cultural impacts, it is necessary to bring in three essential elements which are the visitor (tourist), the visited (host community) and the interaction between visitor-visited. By referring and analyzing these three elements, the most calamitous socio-cultural impact is that of the

commercialization of customs. Indeed, cultural exchange, even if it may have a positive impact in its appearance since it allows the transmission of ideas and know-how, language learning and therefore cultural enrichment, can lead to popularization of traditions and could subsequently generate another impact more accentuated than the first: A loss of identity of the territory which manifests itself in an erosion of the local dialect and traditional culture.

However, according to the same authors, agritourism can be a factor in the re-construction, enhancement and rebirth of local identities and cultures, the enhancement of heritage and the development of local crafts. Also, agritourism participates in the establishment of new social institutions such as hospitals and schools and the improvement of basic infrastructure, resulting in a change in production and employment, which mainly affects women, and improving the quality of life.

However, these changes can lead to a break in traditional social and family ties and low economic profitability from which the local population benefits since most jobs are often seasonal. It is also attractive to mention that agritourism activity leads to the mobilization of local actors and the emergence of new entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the appearance of these promoters can call into question the politics of local power with a transformation of local cultures.

Development of an agritourism project

Steps

Any development of a tourism project follows four main stages, namely initiation and planning, construction and implementation, start-up and management and, finally, follow-ups, evaluations and modifications.

To complement these steps, the World Wide Fund for Nature(WWFN) specifies 12 essential guidelines for the development of a community-based agritourism project, which can nevertheless be used for system-based agritourism. They are presented in the following table, in addition to additional indications from other authors.

Stadium	Stage	GUIDELINES
Initiation and Planning	Evaluate if agritourism is the option appropriate	Evaluate the potential gains in the protection or rehabilitation of the environment. Check for the presence of preconditions for agritourism. Examine the completeness and accuracy of basic information (site specific aspects, ecology and local and regional development) and supplement as necessary. Carry out a study of the environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts. Evaluate the costs and the opportunity gains for the local population.
	Plan agritourism with the communities And the others actors	Adopt a horizontally and vertically integrated approach. Find the best way to involve as many members of the local community as possible. Work together on a common strategy (vision, goals and objectives).
Construction and Implementation	Develop a project agritourism viable	Ensure the environmental and cultural integrity of the region. Make sure of the reality of the market and carry out effective promotion. Offer quality products and services ensuring the safety of visitors and workers. Establish a transparent, responsible decision-making process based on the precautionary principle. Implement measures to prevent negative impacts on the natural, socio-cultural and economic environments.
	Develop the facilities and infrastructure required	Optimize the use of local human and material resources. Provide training to local communities and grant apprenticeship diplomas as needed. Adopt environmentally friendly construction methods and materials. Manage and mitigate the negative environmental impacts associated with the construction of facilities and infrastructure. Facilitate access to the site through the construction of roads and telecommunications. Establish basic health infrastructure and any infrastructure to limit negative impacts on the environment. Respect the architecture and the landscape for the construction of new buildings or infrastructures.

Start-up and management	Strengthen benefits for the communities and the environment local	Manage and mitigate the negative impacts associated with agritourism activities. Strengthen the quality, reliability and competitiveness of local products by providing the necessary technical support. Optimize the employment of local or national workers, including in managerial positions. Promote gender equality and promote the integration of the most vulnerable groups in the agritourism organization. Strengthen links with local actors in order to reduce financial losses. Obtain support from visitors and tour operators. Promote and participate in the establishment of community development projects. Set up a participatory and adaptive management process.
Follow-ups, evaluations and modifications	Implement a system of follow-up and rigorous evaluation	Monitor economic, social, cultural and environmental performance and ensure the continuity and continuous improvement of agritourism activities. Evaluate the beneficial impacts resulting from community projects set up or supported by the agritourism organization and find ways to maximize them. Monitor the environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts resulting from agritourism activities and put in place measures to correct the negative impacts.

Sources: WWF[7], OMT[8], Prosser[9] and Gurún, C.P. & De Coursey, M. [10].

Interactions between stakeholders

One of the dominant principles of agritourism is the involvement of interested parties, at all stages of development. To this end, it is important to deepen the role that local communities and other civil society actors can play in any agritourism project. In this way, the planned project will be able to consider the interests of each.

Involvement of the local population

There are different levels of participation of local populations, ranging from what is commonly called non-participation to shared power. In the first case, the populations have access to information concerning the envisaged project, but this information is often biased and subjective. At the other end of the scale of participation, local communities are called upon to share power, this sharing going as far as full or partial control of the project.

In order to promote the effective participation of the host populations, they should be able to reach the level of shared power. The interest of local communities in the project will be greatly increased if they are involved in all phases of development and if there are appropriate planning structures that facilitate the consideration of their interests. Likewise, if there is complementarity between their own livelihood strategies and those of the targeted development and if the agritourism project is based on traditional and local knowledge, they will be more inclined to get involved.

Involvement of other actors

Besides the local communities, other actors can be involved in an agritourism project. All civil society actors, i.e. all non-state entities of a local, regional or national character, as well as the various levels of government and private companies can act within such a project. If they are directly or indirectly affected by it.

Educational component

The educational component of agritourism brings together information, awareness, education, training and interpretation for stakeholders, the local population and tourists.

Impacts of agritourism

Although the negative impacts are minimized during an agritourism development, any development inevitably generates changes in its host environment, whether positive or negative. Consequently, it is important to clearly identify the environmental, social and economic costs that may arise during the development of such a project and, more particularly, in developing countries, where the technical and financial means are generally less. Important than in industrialized countries. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will deal with the many costs associated with agritourism development in relation to their possible causes.

On the other hand, agritourism also provides a wide range of benefits that can offset these costs, provided that the negative impacts of agritourism activities are minimized as well as its positive impacts maximized. The environmental, social and economic benefits that can result from a well-managed agritourism will be presented in the second section of

this chapter. Subsequently, certain ethical considerations concerning agritourism will be presented, not to discredit the development of agritourism, but to deepen reflection on this subject.

Negative impacts of agritourism

The negative impacts likely to be associated with agritourism development are similar to those associated with tourism activities in general. However, the very concept of agritourism refers to smaller-scale tourism, the impacts of which are prevented, managed, monitored and corrected.

However, some impacts are more easily discernible than others. For example, it is easier to detect the extent of erosion of a site than to account for the extent of acculturation attributable to agritourism activities. In fact, the agritourism organization wishing to work within a community will have to focus more on these aspects that are more difficult to detect. In addition, the impact monitoring scale should be extended to the local and regional environment, and not only to the immediate surroundings of the agritourism site, in order to obtain a realistic portrait of the impacts caused.

Positive impacts of agritourism

Of course, agritourism also offers important benefits at local, regional and national levels. These benefits are, however, conditional on the involvement of as many actors as possible, at each of its stages of development. This involvement leads to decision-making across all segments of society, so that agritourism and other resource users can coexist and even bring mutual benefits. In addition, the establishment of links with the local population and the actors of the local socio-economic environment represents another essential condition for the amplification of the benefits. Indeed, it is when the links with the economy and the local population are strong that the benefits of tourism are felt at the local level [2].

- Establishment of an attractive environment for residents and visitors
- Opportunity for greater understanding and communication between people from diverse backgrounds
- Rehabilitation of natural environments or degraded wildlife habitats
- Productive use of marginal land for agriculture, allowing the conservation of natural vegetation cover
- Support for research and development in good environmental practices and management systems
- Monitoring, evaluation and management of the impacts of agritourism.

Method for evaluating an agritourism project: Guide to evaluating an agritourism project

According to Charbonneau[11], the criteria to be considered for the evaluation of an agritourism project in developing countries are divided into three categories: Prerequisites, Recommended practices, Additional efforts

In order to correspond to a sustainable agritourism project, the agritourism organization must comply with all the criteria classified as pre-requisites, while actions corresponding to criteria of recommended practices and/or additional efforts indicate the improvements to be made to apply the best possible practices.

The evaluation criteria have been listed so as to correspond to five guiding principles, namely:

- ✓ Principle 1: The agritourism organization is based on principles of sustainability.
- ✓ Principle 2: The agritourism organization continues to apply best practices at all stages of development.
- ✓ Principle 3: The agritourism organization offers quality products and services.
- ✓ Principle 4: The agritourism organization promotes the economic and social development of local communities.
- ✓ Principle 5: The agritourism organization maximizes

A. Principle 1: The agritourism organization is based on principles of sustainability

• Pre-development studies

Develop an agritourism project constituting an appropriate development option and plan the project according to the agritourism development alternative most likely to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts. The studies carried out must be provided with this evaluation grid.

• Legislative compliance

Meet the strictest local and national standards in agritourism, environment and sustainable development. The agritourism project also responds to the principles of international charters, conventions and codes in the field of agritourism and tourism in general. In each case, the regulations, laws, policies, conventions, charters, codes and standards complied with must be listed and the measures taken to comply with them presented.

- **Master plan**

Develop a master plan including a mission, mandates, values, objectives and strategies common to all stakeholders. This plan is accompanied by planning documents and is provided with this evaluation grid.

- **Internal policies**

Develop internal policies on which the agritourism organization can rely for decision-making and the development of products, services and programs.

- **Codes of conduct**

Formulate, apply and promote a code of conduct promoting respect for the environment and the harmony of interpersonal and intercultural relations.

B. Principle 2: The agritourism organization pursues the application of best practices at all stages of development

- **Planning the project**

Plan a viable agritourism project promoting the conservation and even improvement of the environment as well as the quality and standard of living of local communities.

- **Project localization**

Choose the site for the development of the agritourism project with a view to minimizing negative impacts and maximizing benefits for the local population and the environment.

- **Construction activities**

Use environmentally friendly techniques before, during and after construction activities. If the agritourism project does not require any new construction, assess the following criteria according to the infrastructure and buildings used.

- **Construction materials**

Use environmentally friendly building materials for all new construction. In the event that the agritourism project does not require any new construction, assess the following criteria according to the materials used for the existing infrastructure and buildings.

- **Design of buildings and facilities**

Design and construct buildings as well as develop spaces in such a way as to limit negative impacts on the environment.

- **Management of internal operations of the agritourism organization**

Manage the internal operations of the agritourism organization so as to minimize their negative impacts on the environment, customers and the local population. The measures taken to this end must be detailed.

- **Internal programs**

Set up internal programs promoting the minimization of negative impacts and the maximization of positive impacts on the site's environment.

- **Human resources**

Encourage the hiring of local workers on a principle of equal opportunity for all and offer them the best possible working conditions.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**

Ensure the suitability of the agritourism products and services offered, by monitoring and managing the environmental, social and economic impacts associated with them. Also ensure the adequacy of the programs, activities and operations of the agritourism organization by evaluating the management methods adopted and the results obtained.

- **Responsible Marketing**

Put in place a responsible marketing strategy, in order to establish relationships of trust with customers and contribute to the development of the local economy.

- ***Distribution of profits***

Equitably distribute the benefits arising from agritourism activities so as to ensure their perpetuity.

C. Principle 3: The agritourism organization offers quality products and services

- **Agritourism product**

Develop an agritourism product reflecting the principles of agritourism.

- **Agritourism services**

Offer quality services promoting an enriching and satisfying experience for customers.

- **Interpretation activities**

Offer interpretation activities allowing tourists to familiarize themselves with the natural and cultural heritage of the region visited.

D. Principle 4: The agritourism organization promotes the economic and social development of local communities

- **Involvement of local communities**

Maximize the number of members of the local community involved in the agritourism project, at each of its stages of development.

- **Respect for local communities**

Maintain harmonious relations with local communities by maintaining and promoting a respectful attitude towards them.

- **Improvement of the quality of life of local communities**

Promote and participate in initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of local communities.

- **Improvement of the standard of living of local communities**

Ensure that members of the local community have the means to improve their standard of living.

E. Principle 5: The agritourism organization maximizes its collaboration with civil society actors and governments

- **Improvement of the socio-economic environment**

Integrate agritourism activities into the local, regional and national economy so as to strengthen the multiplier effect of agritourism.

- **Promotion of responsible and sustainable tourism**

The agritourism organization promotes the conservation of natural areas and actions to protect the region's natural environment and the protection and sustainable use of local and regional natural resources.

CONCLUSION

Agritourism continues to contribute to and strengthen the viability of agritourism activity in general by increasing economic and social benefits for host communities, actively participating in the protection of natural resources and the cultural integrity of communities and welcoming and increasing the awareness of travelers to the protection of the natural and cultural heritage.

It is emphasized that at the same time, whenever, in natural and rural spaces, agritourism is not planned, developed and managed judiciously, it contributes to the degradation of natural landscapes, threats to wildlife and on biodiversity, pollution of seas and coasts, poor water quality, poverty, displacement of local and indigenous communities and the erosion of cultural traditions. For this, the development of agritourism must take into consideration and respect land and property rights, and, when recognized, the right to self-determination and cultural sovereignty of local and indigenous communities, including their protected sites sensitive and sacred, as well as their traditional knowledge.

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