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ATTITUDES OF OWNERS AND PERSPECTIVES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURIST BUSINESS IN VOJVODINA FARMS

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Abstract. Thinking sustainably and “green” through the activities of almost all organizations and companies, but also through personal attitudes and actions, has become an imperative of socially responsible business for those who deal with tourism and hospitality. There is an entrenched view that tourism should be viewed more broadly, i.e. as a system that, in addition to tourists and the economy, also includes the environment and society as a whole. Taking care of sustainable tourism development has become everyone’s obligation –both supply and demand. For the purposes of this research, the opinions of owners of Vojvodina salaš farms engaged in tourism and providing hospitality services were examined through a survey. The goal of the work is to determine, based on the presentation of various contents and activities on salaš farms (representation of ethnic complexes and accommodation facilities, organic food products, ecotourism activities, additional contents...) whether they respect the concept of sustainable development and whether they strive for it. Also, to answer the question whether traditional, but also “increasingly numerous” modern facilities on salaš farms contribute to the concept of sustainability? The analysis of the collected data was performed using the SPSS.26.00 statistical program, descriptive statistics were presented and One-way ANOVA was performed. The results of the research indicate a positive attitude of the respondents regarding the sustainable development of tourism, but also differences in their attitudes regarding the enrichment of the tourist offer on salaš farms with modern amenities.

Keywords: tourism, hospitality, sustainable development, attitude research, offer holders, salaš farms, Vojvodina.

Introduction

The development of society is largely determined by the relationship between man and nature. The environment has always been an object of interest and admiration,

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but the lack of environmental awareness of the majority has meant that the adaptation of nature to human needs has become a strong anthropogenic influence, leading to inevitable destruction. The first wave of environmental awareness began in the 1970s with the emergence of public concern about the deteriorating state of the earth. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Agbedahin, 2019; Halisçelik, Soytaş, 2019). Originally, tourism was not the focus of the Brundtland Report's discussion of sustainability principles, but it soon became the predominant activity under which sustainable development is promoted (Zhang, Chan, 2020). Holden, Linnerud & Banister (2017) argue that sustainable development is a moral imperative to meet needs, ensure equity and respect environmental constraints. Indeed, tourism depends more than any other activity on a quality environment, but on the other hand, the environment suffers from the consequences of uncontrolled development, i.e. mass tourism. Even small changes in tourists' behavior during the trip itself can have a positive impact on the human environment (Wut et al., 2023). It is precisely for this reason that it is necessary to refer to the concept of sustainable tourism and promote its development. Moreover, sustainable tourism not only protects important ecological resources, but also promotes the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, promotes local authentic products and stimulates economic development at the local and regional level (Waldemar, Dyer, 2024).

Farms in Vojvodina have a long tradition and are considered a special social phenomenon in the Pannonian region, symbolizing the former struggle of farmers with the wasteland (Demirović, 2018). At the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century, the terrain of Vojvodina was covered by loess plains and ridges, which made Vojvodina unsuitable for living. The distances between the villages were great, so only the land closer to the villages was cultivated. This situation led to the emergence of farms, where livestock farming initially dominated, and at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, the conditions for arable farming were created (amelioration works) (Angelovska Nedeljković, 2006; Radović, 2018). It is assumed that there were up to 11,000 farms before the First World War. Between the two wars, there were around 440 farms with more than 2,000 inhabitants. Most of them were located in Bačka and in northern and central Banat. Due to the agrarian reform and its physical destruction after the Second World War, urbanization and the modern lifestyle, many farms were wiped out. According to recent data, there were 237 inhabited and 27 uninhabited farms in the first decade of the 21st century (Košić et al., 2014). Today, only 53 farms are listed on the website of the Vojvodina Tourism Organization (<https://vojvodina.travel/>).

Compared to other buildings and structures in Vojvodina, the peculiarity of farms is reflected in their appearance, furnishings, cuisine and lifestyle. Farms are a

kind of urban and architectural unit with old traditional furniture. Each farmhouse had a residential and farm part. The residential building contained living rooms and guest rooms. There was a front parlor, the middle parlor, which served as both kitchen and dining room and from which the brick oven in the front parlor was fired, a pantry at the side and a veranda in front of the front door. The farm buildings were inseparable from the farmhouse: a grain shed, a barn, sheds for storing tools and carts, pens, chicken coops and pigsties. The original material used to construct the farm buildings was clay, later brick and more recently brick. The buildings were roofed with reeds and later with tiles. In front of the farmstead there was an obligatory deep dug well on the jeram, from which the inhabitants of the farmstead and the livestock drank healthy water and which was used to store food and cool drinks in the summer (Pajović, Pavlica, 2002).

The authors Čurčić & Pavlović (2011) point out that over time, farms have become places where agriculture lives in harmony with nature and where rural, ecotourism and sustainable tourism have developed as new types of farmers' activities, but also so-called agritourism. According to the same authors, agritourism means a tourist offer on farms in Vojvodina, as a specific form of agricultural enterprises, and represents a specific market niche of a particular form of tourism. In recent years, however, a redefinition of the concept of a farm has taken place (Košić, Pejanović & Radović, 2013), where, in addition to the preserved traditional elements, numerous modern contents in the field of services and additional activities are introduced, which are offered to tourists as an integral package, combining "tradition and modernity".

Considering the pronounced centralization of Serbia and the orientation of attention and resources towards Belgrade (Živanović et al., 2019) as the main administrative center, the economic aspect of sustainable tourism is particularly evident in the business activities of the surveyed businesses in Vojvodina. The concept of sustainable development and green economy represents a mechanism that leads to the improvement and development of human well-being while insisting on the reduction of environmental risks. Its principles are embedded in the economic, social and environmental spheres (Đorić, 2021). In addition, they strive to create employment conditions and contribute to the reduction of inequalities between social classes (Al-Taai, 2021). Accordingly, the concept of "green tourism" developed, which Dodds & Joppe (2001) divide into four components:

- environmental stewardship - preserving and enhancing nature and the physical environment to ensure the long-term conservation of the ecosystem;
- local economic vitality – supporting the local economy, businesses and community;
- cultural diversity - respecting and valuing culture;

- experiential richness – enriching experiences through personal interest and active participation in nature, culture, people and places.

It is precisely through these components that the potential of the farm can be recognized, which thanks to the authentic tourist offer (preserved nature, accommodation in facilities that maintain the traditional style, offer of local products of organic origin, creative tourism - production of authentic items, active participation in the work of the host, etc.) contributes to the popularization of responsible tourism and forms a good basis for the integration of modern specific trends such as green economy and sustainable tourism with the traditional way of life and work.

Although farms have been much researched as a cultural and ecological feature of the Pannonian region, they are still underutilized in tourism presentation and are therefore a legitimate topic of this research. The aim of the work is to determine the possibility of uniting the tradition of farms in Vojvodina and the modern trends that guide today's tourist demand and shape the offer. Based on the answers received and the carefully considered views of the interviewees, it is possible to talk more concretely about the sustainable tourism business of farmers in Vojvodina, as well as the possibilities and limitations for the future development of this specific form of tourism, which is called agritourism.

Materials and methods

The main research instrument in this work is a questionnaire formulated as an online survey and sent to 40 official email addresses of selected farms in Vojvodina (those that, considering the offer on the website of the Vojvodina Tourism Organization and its websites, were considered to be providing or offering gastronomic and tourist services in accordance with sustainable business principles). It was assumed that all participants in this research initially participated voluntarily and then honestly answered the questions asked in the questionnaire, and the sample obtained is considered valid. The survey consisted of three parts, the first of which requested the respondents' answers on the geographical and socio-demographic characteristics of the farmers and the activities carried out on the farm. The second part of the survey contained a series of questions on agricultural and sustainable tourism, potentials and limitations, as well as questions on basic tourism characteristics (scope and structure of tourism and hospitality services offered and the main characteristics of tourists visiting them). The third part of the survey was designed in the form of a Likert scale on which respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the given statements (from 1 to 5, i.e. from total disagreement to total agreement). The questionnaire was available to farm owners for three weeks (from the end of March to the first half of April 2024). Data analysis and processing was carried

out using the IBM SPSS statistical analysis computer program (version 26.00). Descriptive statistics methods were used to describe the observed phenomena (mean of respondents' answers - mean and standard deviation - df), and inferential statistics were used to test the hypothesis, i.e. a one-way ANOVA was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between respondents according to their place of residence (divided into the three categories "I live on a farm", "I live in a village", "I live in a town") when asked about the 15 Likert scale variables.

In the following text, the analysis and interpretation of the results was carried out according to the set research task, which is to examine the views of farm owners in Vojvodina and their understanding and implementation of the principles of sustainable development and agritourism. The paper presents the farm tourism offer that points to authenticity and responsible action.

In order to show the perspectives of the union of tradition and sustainability on the investigated farms of Vojvodina and modern content through contemporary trends that guide the tourist offer and characterize the demand, a general hypothesis was formulated, which is "*The tourist offer on the farms is determined by the lifestyle and mindset of their owners*".

Results and discussion

Of the total of 40 farms to which the survey was sent, 10 responded to the survey, whose basic geographical and tourism/hospitality characteristics are listed in Table 1. The oldest establishment has been in operation since 1993, two have been open since 1996, one since 2006, two since 2008, one since 2012, one since 2013 and two since 2015. In terms of gender structure, 50% of the respondents were women and 50% men. The age structure of the business owners shows that most of them are middle-aged, i.e. over 50 years old, while two respondents belong to the younger generation and are 32 and 40 years old. 7 respondents have primary school education, 2 respondents have completed secondary school and 1 respondent has higher education. Five farms are active in tourism, agriculture and the sale of local products of organic origin, the others are only active in tourism and gastronomy. The number of farm members involved in the provision of tourism and hospitality services ranges from 3 to 15.

Table 1. Basic geographical and tourism/hospitality characteristics of the respondents

Name of the farm	Location	Year of operation	Accommodation capacity (number of beds)	Catering services	Duration of operation of farm	Number of visitors per year
Djeram Farm	Mokrin	2006.	8	yes	All year round	300-500
Buca's Farm	Temerin	2012.	/	yes	All year round	over1.000
Katai Farm	Mali Idjoš	1996.	100	yes	Seasonal (spring/autumn)	over 1.000
Majkin's Farm	Palić	1996.	30	yes	All year round	over 1.000
Our Farm	Gradina	2015.	8	yes	All year round	over 1.000
Lujza Farm	Belo Blato	2008.	In the process of adaptation	yes	Seasonal (spring/autumn)	over 1.000
Tandari Farm	Martonoš	2013.	26	yes	All year round	over 1.000
Isailovi	Sremska Mitrovica	2015.	6	yes	opened only when visitors are announced	100-300
Rokin Farm	Nosa, Ludaš lake	1993.	17	yes	opened only when visitors are announced	500-1.000
Blue Farm *	Čenej	2008.	9	/	opened only when visitors are announced	up to 100

Legend: *Due to unresolved disputes and long-standing problems with electricity supply, Plavi Salaš is currently unable to operate in the hospitality and tourism sector; but successfully organizes and conducts numerous workshops that serve as a complement to the tourist stay.

The differences between the surveyed businesses can be seen, among other things, in the services offered (almost all offer catering and accommodation services with different capacities, expressed by the number of beds), in the operating time during the year and in the number of visitors on an annual basis (Table 1). Regarding the visitor structure, 80% of the respondents stated that the farms are visited equally by domestic and foreign visitors, and 20% that domestic visitors still predominate. In terms of age structure, respondents indicated that the majority of visitors are middle-aged (70%), followed by young people (20%) and older visitors, pensioners—10%. Regarding the length of stay, respondents indicate that most guests come over the weekend (two nights) - 40%, then those who stay for one day (no overnight stay) - 30%, those who stay for a short time (come for a few hours) - 20% and finally those who stay for more than three days - 10%.

Analyzing the answers of farm owners to questions about sustainable management and tourism, we can generally speak of a positive attitude and attitude towards the sustainable development of tourism on farms. In this context, the answers with 100% agreement of all survey participants to the questions whether they know what the concept of sustainable tourism entails and whether they would invest more in their tourism offer on the farm if it would contribute to the ecological balance and the protection of the environment are to be regarded as very significant. Also when answering the question “Is it important to you that tourists contribute to ecological balance and environmental protection? “Is it important to you that tourists do not endanger nature during their stay on your farm?”, where they chose the answer “very important”. Out of 10 respondents, only one gave a negative answer to the question: “Would you organize educational workshops for visitors to show them the importance of preserving the natural and cultural values on your farms”?

When asked if they believe that too many tourists who do not care about the environment can threaten farm values, 60% of respondents expressed their fear, while 40% disagreed with this opinion. That there is no reason to be afraid of a larger number of tourists was expressed by one of the respondents through an additional answer that expressed his misunderstanding of this question: “In the 30 years that we have been working, no one has damaged cultural or natural values, on the contrary, that is the reason for their arrival.” I do not understand why you are asking this.”

In line with the views of Živković, Petrović & Ercegović (2020) that service activities and ecotourism are most exposed to the effects of competition, especially from the aspect of quality and business efficiency, Table 2 shows the differences between the participants in the survey, depending on the tourist-hotel services and activities they offer.

Table 2. Services provided on farms that took part in the survey

Name of the farm	Services provided on farm
Djeram Farm, Mokrin	accommodation services; catering services (home-made food and drinks); workshop for making objects from clay; brandy pot; children's playground; organization of cultural and artistic programs; art colonies; concerts and demonstration of folk customs; organization of seminars and festivals.
Buca's Farm, Temerin	food services (home cooking); mini-zoo; children's playground; soccer and basketball courts.
Katai Farm, Mali Idjoš	accommodation services; catering; organizing conferences and seminars; playgrounds; getting to know pets, riding horses and donkeys; carriage rides; making handicrafts using various techniques; hiking; collecting medicinal plants; possibility of organizing day trips and schools in nature for students from 1st to 4th grade; camps for primary school students (English camp, art camp, eco camp, old crafts camp); organizing a visit to the bakery museum; swimming and fishing at the lake.
Majkin's Farm, Palić	accommodation services; catering services (home cooking); outdoor swimming pool; meeting room and reception; tambourine music; carp pond; sports fields; horse stables; orchards and an acacia grove; organization of festivals; open-air museum; winery; production of home-made juice.
Our Farm, Gradina	accommodation services; catering services (home cooking); organization of festivals and weddings and business lunches; children's playground; picture gallery and ethnic collection; sale of handicrafts from old crafts; proximity to the "Pannonian Road of Peace" cycle path.
Lujza Farm, Belo Blato	food services (traditional gastronomic offer and healthy food); breeding of domestic animals.
Tandari Farm, Martonoš	accommodation services; catering services; organization of business seminars, celebrations; camping in natural environment; contents for children; orchard; sports fields; mini-zoo; sport fishing and hunting tourism.
Isailovi Farm, Sremska Mitrovica	accommodation services; catering services (home cooking); organization of meetings, weddings and celebrations; picnic area; organization of tours or lessons on local culture; children's playground.
Rokin Farm, Nosa, Ludaš lake	accommodation services; catering services (traditional Hungarian cuisine and home-made products); ethnological collection of authentic original objects; organization of farm tours; school trips; family celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries); organization of seminars, conferences, manifestations; children's camps and workshops; children's playground; table soccer, table tennis; there is accommodation, decorated rooms in the old style (currently out of service); promotion of old crafts and products of old crafts; organization of traditional festivals and events; exhibitions and fairs; promotion of healthy organic food; organization of seminars, art workshops, outdoor educational camps, organization of wine and farm evenings.
Blue Farm, Čenej	accommodation services; catering services (home-made food and drinks); workshop for making objects from clay; brandy pot; children's playground; organization of cultural and artistic programs; art colonies; concerts and demonstration of folk customs; organization of seminars and festivals.

Source: (The authors have researched on the basis of surveys and supplemented on the

basis of information from the following sources: www.etnokucadjeram.com; <https://www.moja-delatnost.rs/salas-temerin/etno-kuca-bucin-salas/MMQxUPZ>; www.katai.farm; www.majkinsalas.rs; www.nassalas.com; <https://vojvodina.travel/salas-lujza-belo-blato/>; www.salasi-tandari.com; <https://www.booking.com/hotel/rs/salas-isailovi.sr.html>; <https://vojvodina.travel/plavi-salas-cenej/>; <https://palic.rs/sta-raditi/salas-vinarija/rokin-salas/>)

The authors of the paper consider that the difference in farm owners' thinking regarding the presentation of purely traditional or the need for the presence of "modern content" (which may not be compatible with the environment and the function of the farm) and their position on sustainable development integrated into their own tourism offer depends strongly on whether they live on the farm itself, in a rural or urban environment. It is assumed that owners living on farms are more inclined to preserve purely traditional values of farms and sustainable development, as are those living in rural areas compared to owners living in urban areas (to whom the farm may have been left as a "trust" and who are therefore more oriented towards an offer that attracts and satisfies the needs of "sophisticated" tourism demand at all costs).

Although farm owners generally agree with most of the statements in the survey, namely:

- The farm should be located in a preserved natural environment (mean 4.80; pd .483);
- The farm should contribute to the development of the local community (preservation and improvement of traditional local features and values) (mean 4.70; Sd. .675);
- I would like to offer my guests only traditional gastronomic-Vojvodina specialties (mean 4.70; Sd. .483);
- The farm supports activities related to ecotourism and quality of stay in nature (mean 4.60; Sd .483);
- Agritourism is an opportunity for tourists to return to true values (mean 4.50; Sd. .455);
- The economic impact of businesses is visible and opens up opportunities for further investment (mean 4.10; Sd. .994);
- Through tourism and hospitality, I try to promote and sell local products (mean 4.00; Sd. 1.054);
- The current tourism offer on the farm is a good basis for attracting tourists (mean 4.40; Sd. .516);
- Tourism on the farm offers the opportunity to meet people with different cultures and interests (mean 4.40; Sd. .665);
- Compared to other catering businesses, farms contribute more to sustainable development because they have a balanced and positive impact on society and the environment (mean 4.20; Sd. .919);

- The farm that belongs to me can work in a sustainable and ecologically responsible way in the future (mean 4.60; pd. .516).

Nevertheless, some very important statements can be singled out where a statistically significant difference (significance level ($p < 0.05$)) was found in relation to attitudes towards tourism and hospitality on farms (see Table 3), which is why the hypothesis: “The tourism offer on farms is determined by the lifestyle and mindset of their owners” should be partially accepted. Although a statistically significant difference was found between respondents for a smaller number of statements (4 out of 15), and as the difference occurred for the “most important” statements, the hypothesis should not be completely rejected as it indicates differences in the attitudes and mindsets of owners.

Table 3. Selected attitudes based on the one-factorial analysis of variance ANOVA - attitudes of farm owners according to their place of residence

Claims	Place of residence	N	M	F	p
Today, the farmhouse should be designed to meet the current trend in tourism: a combination of tradition and modernity (old architecture enhanced with modern and comfortable facilities with great capacity and innovative equipment and technology).	farm	3	2.56	4210	.006
	village	3	3.13		
	city	4	4.25		
The farm's guests should be offered accommodation and catering exclusively in the traditional style (old and authentic architecture)	farm	3	4.35	6264	.020
	village	3	4.00		
	city	4	3.07		
We exclusively maintain the traditional architectural style of this region, authentic for the Vojvodina Plain	farm	3	4.45	5964	.027
	village	3	4.15		
	city	4	3.75		
Young entrepreneurs as owners of farms should primarily influence the trend towards green economy in order to become a model of thinking for sustainable tourism development of farms	farm	3	3.78	4970	.048
	village	3	4.05		
	city	4	4.37		

Legend: N – number of respondents; M – arithmetic mean (mean value of answers), F – statistical value, p – significance level ($p < 0.05$).

Based on the results obtained, it can be said that there is an awareness and a positive attitude of farm owners towards sustainable tourism development, but when it comes to the tourism offer, we can divide them into two groups: Traditionalists - those who tend towards pure traditionalism (ethnic characteristics of local values,

exclusively authentic content for accommodation and stay, organic products and food....) and the so-called “modernists”—those who, in order to increase the number of guests and satisfy the “hedonistic” and “differentiated” taste of tourist demand, are willing to add modern facilities to the traditional ones (modern and comfortable facilities with large capacity and innovative equipment and technology, swimming pools, wellness and spa centers, etc.). Demirović (2018) comes to a similar conclusion when he states that in the area of Vojvodina today there are a number of farms that have been converted into tourist services or agro-ecological facilities.

Tourism is often described as an activity that can significantly contribute to the development of a given region, as an activity that enhances various natural and anthropogenic values and thus attracts tourists and investments and creates conditions for the creation of new jobs and improvement of living standards (Počuča, Matijašević-Obradović, 2020). We can see consistency with these conclusions precisely in the attitudes of those farm owners who described themselves as “modernists”, i.e. those who are willing to introduce new things and combine traditional and modern content on the farms.

Furthermore, this study, as well as the one conducted by Radović (2018), assumes that sustainable tourism and hospitality and the revitalization of farms contribute to the achievement of numerous benefits: economic (additional income through the provision of tourism services), demographic (improvement of the age and economic structure of the population in rural areas), cultural (increasing interest in preserving traditions), infrastructural and communal (improvement of roads, construction of water supply, sewerage, etc.), integrative (promoting the development of rural areas, etc.), integrative (promotion of the development of complementary activities and revival of old crafts), but above all ecological (growing awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and the importance of local food of organic origin).

As the results of the survey show, respondents believe that the environment on farms is not threatened by tourist activities and that they are willing to organize educational workshops to inform visitors about the importance of conservation. Some have clearly marked information boards about permitted and prohibited activities on the farm.

Conclusion

Farms are a kind of guardians of the tradition and authentic lifestyle of Vojvodina. The development of sustainable tourism and related infrastructure, developed now and in the future in harmony with natural capacities, should support the regeneration and productivity of natural resources, recognize the efforts of people and communities and the customs and lifestyles that contribute to shaping the tourist

experience. It also understands the importance of sharing equally in the economic benefits of local people and host communities. Sustainable tourism is a development concept that reconciles the ecological, socio-cultural and economic components of the environment with the satisfaction of tourists. In this way, it is possible to create an optimal model of tourism development that does not lead to degradation and ensures preservation for future generations. Sustainability must be an imperative for all forms of tourism (not just nature tourism), but especially for those that lead to the development of mass tourism and pose the greatest threat to the environment, cultural heritage and identity of a area.

The results of this work, based on the answers of the respondents to the question: "In what way do you contribute to the preservation of the environment?" (where the owners could tick several answers) are considered to be very significant. The following results were obtained: 40% of respondents answered that they only grow and offer products of organic origin; 40% of respondents use solar energy on the farm and even 70% of respondents use materials from the natural environment (in terms of construction, recycling, reduced use of plastic, etc.). However, none of the respondents stated that they offer the possibility to rent bicycles as an environmentally friendly means of transportation to visit the farm, although this was offered in the survey as well as in the brochures and offers on the websites of some of them. If such an option was previously available and has been removed over time, the owners could be advised to renew or enrich their offer and support sustainability in this way. The suggestion would be to create cycle paths connecting, if not all, at least those closest to the farms (or connecting them to existing ones, e.g. the "Pannonian Road of Peace" cycle path), where fans of this type of tourism are safe and at the same time visitors and guests are welcome on the farms.

Modern society, it seems, is trying more than ever to "return to nature" and tradition, which is especially felt after major health crises such as the recent COVID 19 virus pandemic. A challenge and a risk, but it is up to the owners of the offer, i.e. the farm owners, to decide on their future business and to respect the principles of sustainability. However, caution is needed when making such decisions as there may be a revolt among tourists, especially those who are more environmentally conscious. Therefore, future research could include a survey of tourists' opinions on the inclusion of modern amenities on farms in Vojvodina.

Considering the limitations of this work, we can state that although there are a large number of farms operating on the territory of Vojvodina (53 farms according to current statistics), we encounter a problem due to insufficient engagement in cooperation with key stakeholders as well as insufficient interest in indirect promotion. Most farms have a so-called one-dimensional approach and do not show sufficient interest in collaborating with actors from complementary sectors. The

lack of cooperation with educational institutions that can indirectly participate in promotion and popularization is recognized as a problem and can also be seen as the main limitation of this work (as only 10 out of 40 contacted farm owners supported participation in this research). Involving a larger number of farms and gathering the opinions of their owners would certainly provide a different insight into their way of thinking and doing business, which would give a more complete picture of the farms' tourism offer, and it could be a continuation of some future research, which could include other research topics besides sustainable development, giving an answer to the prospects of their further business.

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