

AGRITOURISM ACTIVITY ORGANIZATION FORMS STAGED FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY IN ROMANIAN RURAL AREA

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Abstract: In a short period of time, agritourism has had a definite evolution, materializing in a representative activity and why not a possible future solution to support the rural environment. Once agritourism activity emerged, it is obvious that over time a certain organization was necessary. Perhaps the oldest form of organization of agritourism activity is the provision of a room. A more complex organizational possibility is the agritourism farm/household. Another form of organization is in the form of specialized agents, who can approach multiple forms of organization. The agritourism activity carried out in rural areas involves the exploitation of a community's resources, which is why it is necessary for local authorities to also be involved in the organization and development of the activity. Through the way it is carried out and the products offered, agritourism activity can be one of the most efficient ways to capitalize on the resources of the rural community.

Key words: agritourism, organization forms, development of rural area

INTRODUCTION

The entire rural area abounds in popular culture values, starting from: the differentiated type of settlements, the originality and age of occupations, the specificity of the dwelling, the traditional costume, the unique folk art, and adding traditional manifestations, all configuring the ancestral way of life. In addition to the elements of tradition, ethnography and folklore, the natural setting represents another means of attracting tourists, especially those city dwellers who want to escape from the urban environment, crowded and quite polluted to a quiet place, clean in nature. In order to recover and develop the rural space, through agritourism activities, different directions of action can be proposed:

- in order to make productive activities efficient is required a more rational use of the resources specific to the rural environment; [1-4]
- the use of rural resources must be made on the principle of sustainability;
- supporting the vitality of the traditional household, determining its transition from the form of subsistence to the productive, profitable form. [6-7]

Agritourism activity can be considered "a sustainable activity" with multiple positive implications for rural areas, being the possibility of sustainable assembly of agricultural, gastronomic, touristic, cultural resources, and the agritourism product is an innovative product. Not only is the agrotourism activity sustainable, at the same time it is a "smart" one, due to the fact that it unites two quite complex fields: the agricultural field and the touristic field, both quite difficult to carry out separately, even more so together, with numerous problems and challenges. [9,11] The benefits generated by starting the agrotourism activity derive from the fact that by carrying out this activity the "entire rural world" is capitalized: from accommodation in the household/farm, to local or artisanal and craft products.

The success of the agritourism activity is generated by the way of organizing, managing the activity itself. Obviously, multiple questions arise: What is the way to follow in ensuring the success of starting the agritourism activity? How much can the profit be?

Will the activity be profitable? How do I know how much I can earn on each segment of the tourism product offered to tourists? How do I set prices? What leisure activities should be included in the agrotourism product? It certainly cannot be said that there is a stereotypical "recipe", a model of success, the result of which would generate success and profitability of the activity. [7] And the fact that each entrepreneur can mix the elements specific to the rural community according to his own imagination brings added value to the activity, and at the same time its originality.

At the level of our country, the organization process of agritourism activity, can be viewed from the general to the particular, from the way the activity is carried out to the way it is organized. The fact is that in a short period of time, agritourism has had a definite evolution, materializing in a representative activity and why not a possible future solution to support the rural environment. [10,13-15]

Perhaps the oldest form of organization of agritourism activity is *the provision of a room*. It is a specific form of organization for households/farms at the beginning of their activity, which cannot focus on offering all the elements of the tourist product. As a rule, this form of organization is "rudimentary", is practiced in developing areas and has the ability to bring additional income to farmers, but for the tourist it comes with the disadvantage of the inability to offer the possibility of food and leisure.

A more complex organizational possibility is *the agritourism farm/household*. This form of organization reflects the essence of agritourism activity and at the same time the inclusion in the product offered of all three elements (accommodation, food, leisure), but especially of the farm's own products and activities.

Another form of organization is in the form of *specialized agents*, who can approach multiple forms of organization, bring more experience in carrying out activities and with benefits for tourists in terms of diversifying the services offered, or ensuring advantageous prices, or diversified tourist programs, etc. [16]

At the time of diversification and even stronger development of agritourism activity *travel agencies* appear, their purpose being to create and offer their own programs, related to those offered by the agritourism farm, and to market them based on a fee/commission.

Foundations, associations and federations can be considered supporting organizational structures, with the aim of coming up with ideas and actions to support the field through the coordination and co-interest of important actors.

The fragmented offer of agritourism activity must be promoted through associative initiatives, so that it can conquer a segment of the tourist market. The association gives the possibility to provide a certain communication that contributes to the development of common initiatives, having a strategic and commercial character. The association in the field of agritourism activity is necessary to solve a series of problems specific to the field: the organizational fragility of the activity; the valorization of sequential economies; the stimulation of small entrepreneurs operating in this sector; the reunification of the specific competencies of the bodies that constitute the tourist organization (companies, associations).

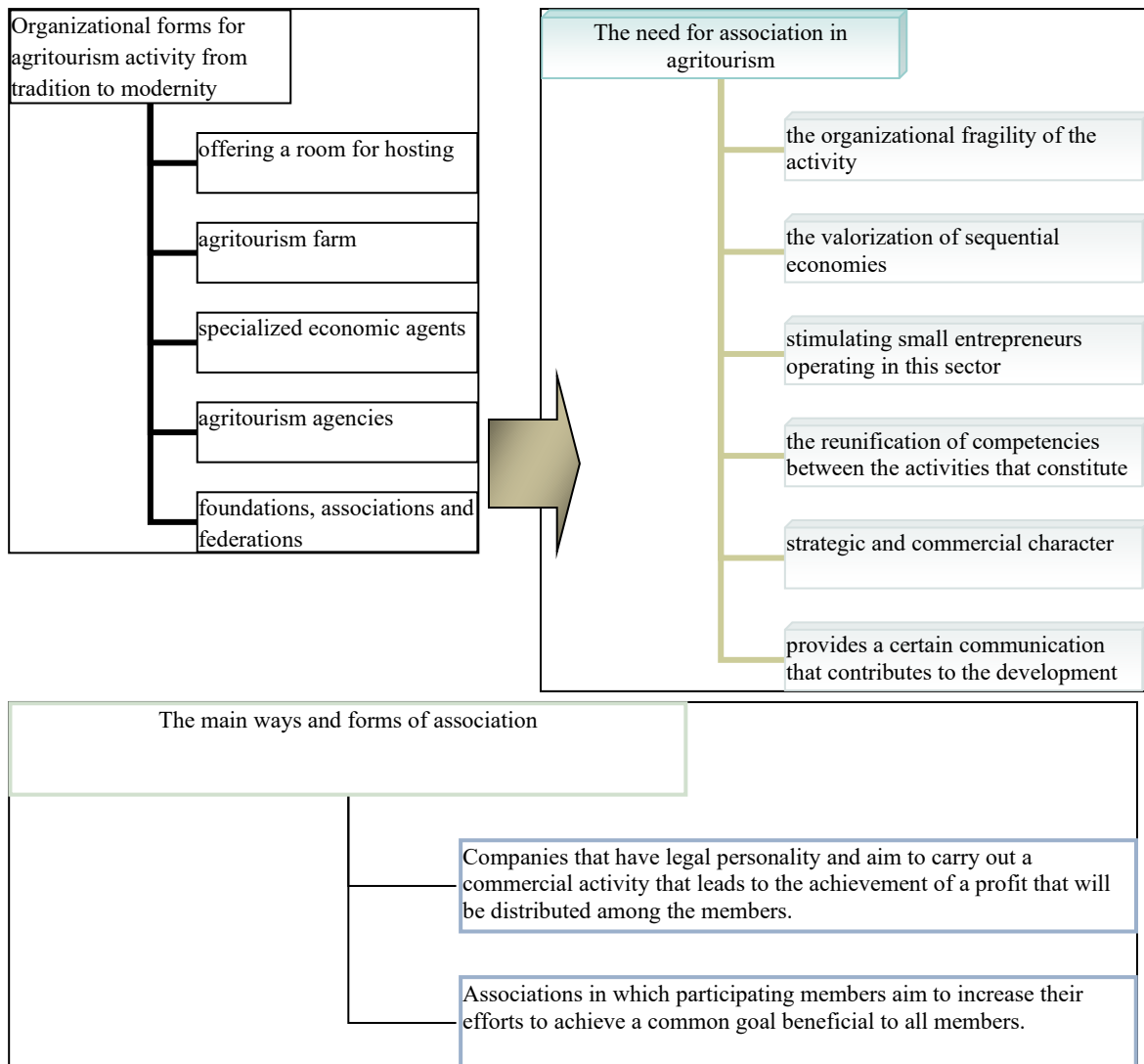


Figure 1. Organizational forms staged from tradition to modernity

Source: own creation

The main forms of association in this field of activity are:

- Companies that have legal personalities and the main purpose of carrying out a commercial activity that leads to the achievement of a profit that will be distributed among the associated members.
- Associations in which participating members have as purpose to increase their efforts to achieve a common goal beneficial to all members. Those who join are primarily interested in increasing the profit of their own activity by saving expenses or by better organizing certain specific phases of the process.

The main functions of these association forms can be summarized in the following directions: promotional activity, solving the problems of associated members, guaranteeing the quality of services, optimizing the use of resources to penetrate the tourism market.

An important role in tourism service activities is played by economic agents specialized in travel and tourism. Depending on the profile and objectives for which they were created, they can be:

- Commercial companies dealing with accommodation with the following profiles: rural hotel; camping; room rental. Within commercial companies dealing with accommodation, there may be structures with annual (permanent) activity, including rest structures, permanently open structures, transit structures and structures with seasonal

activity, which are generally independent of the services they offer and include structures in localities.

- Travel agents, aiming to create complete service packages.
- Tour operators, whose task is to create complete travel service offers, either passenger transport or luggage transport.
- Other categories such as: public structures and non-profit associations and/or institutions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this article is to focus on organization way of agritourism activity, in this regards focusing on:

- *Specific evolutionary stages of agritourism organization at national level*
- *Organization of agritourism at local level*
- *Organizational stages of agritourism at household level.*

As research method it was used the qualitative study method, using as sources of information public information and existing books.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Specific evolutionary stages of agritourism organization at national level

Also for the national organization of agritourism activity in rural communities, it is necessary to go through distinct stages, as follows: [5,8,12]

- in a first stage it is necessary to identify rural communities with possibilities to support tourism activity. Multiple aspects related to existing resources, capacity to support tourism activities, degree of economic development is considered.

- the next stage aims at the concrete organization of the tourist activity, and involves:

- creating organizational support structures at local, county, regional and national levels;
- identifying households/farms with adequate facilities, but also with the possibility and desire to support tourist activities;
- approval of households/farms as agritourism guesthouses;
- preparation of an information/promotion system for the tourist offer (tourist information offices, leaflets, catalogues of tourist units in the area, maps, etc.).

Organization of agritourism at local level

In the case of organizing agritourism activity at the local level, certain steps are also followed:

- *The first stage* involves selecting areas (villages, communes) suitable for this activity, based on a series of aspects such as:

- the natural and anthropogenic resources specific to the location that can support agritourism activity in the future;
- the intensity of practicing agricultural activities;
- the attitude of locals towards agritourism activity and the desire to practice it;
- infrastructure specific to agritourism activity.

The second stage involves the creation of an agritourism household/farm as the main model to be followed. These households/farms would exploit both natural resources and anthropogenic resources.

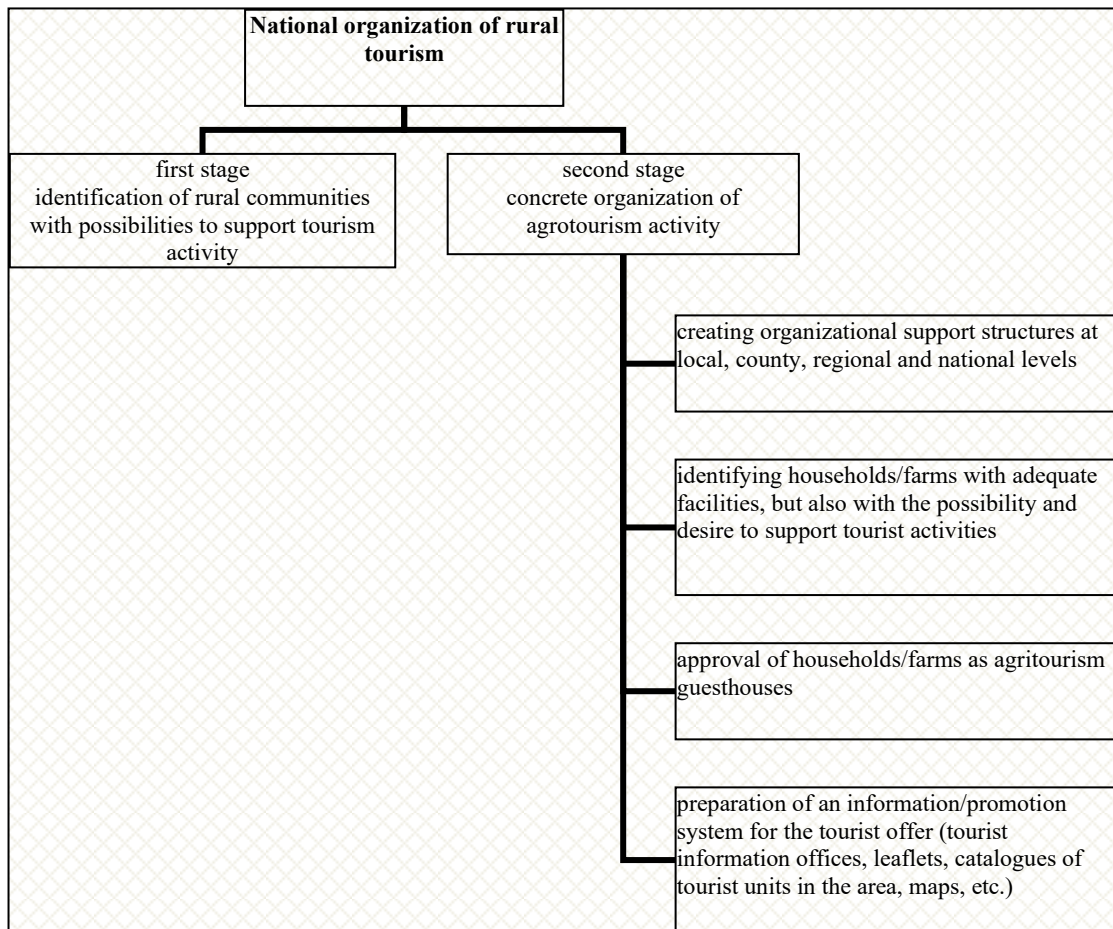


Figure 2. Evolutionary stages of agritourism organization at national level

Source: own creation

The third stage involves identifying farmers/entrepreneurs willing to carry out agritourism activities. This stage is also characterized by the phasing of activities so as to be able to classify them by comfort classes and thus ensure the activity. Depending on the components of the tourism product offered, the owner must take into account the creating of various routes for the tourists so as to see the surroundings, involve tourists in production activities at their request, facilitate their connections with various people in the locality, provide details about socio-economic life and particular traditions of local community.

In the fourth stage, it is necessary to create support structures at the local level, in order to manage the organization of agritourism activity.

The involvement of local authorities in the organization and development of agritourism activity can be achieved through:

- Creating a partnership between authorities and tourist associations from the area with the aim of following up on the organization, development and promotion of the activity. In this regard, both the associations involved, and the specific entrepreneurs must come with specific input, including financial input.
- Along with the development of agrotourism activity, it is also necessary to establish information centers, agencies and tourist dispatch centers, their main purpose being to ensure the promotion of necessary information for potential tourists, but also for entrepreneurs in the field.

- Developing complementary activities in the field is another necessity, but it also brings advantages to the local community by offering the possibility of direct marketing of products or craft objects.

- Organizing cultural centers with the support of existing institutions in the rural community: school, church and other cultural units, generally as support for the leisure part. All these aspects implemented, generate a beautiful story of the location, of the way of life on the farm/in the country, generating in the tourist's mind the desire to purchase various products from the rural environment and implicitly to return.

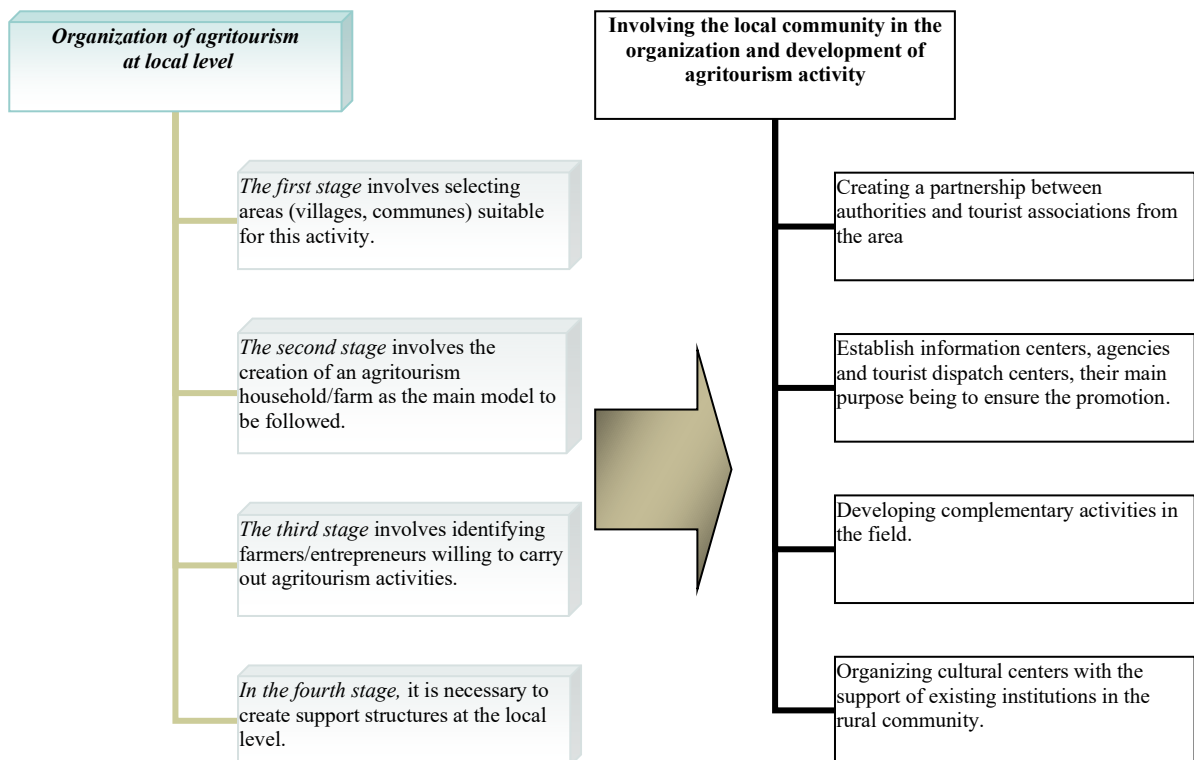


Figure 3. Organization of agritourism at local level and local community involvement

Source: own creation

Organizational stages of agritourism at household level

In organizing and developing tourism activity at the household/agritourism farm level, two stages are followed:

1. a beginning stage with accent on specific preparing aspects
2. a stage in which the agritourism activity is developed.

Initial stage involves some investments even if the conditions are apparently achieved (repairs, building modifications, etc). At this stage, both financial resources are needed, but especially the identification of answers to certain questions: I bet on right activity? Will I have tourist? I will be able to create products competitive with the existing ones on the market? Do I know the important information from the field? If not, where do I get the information from?

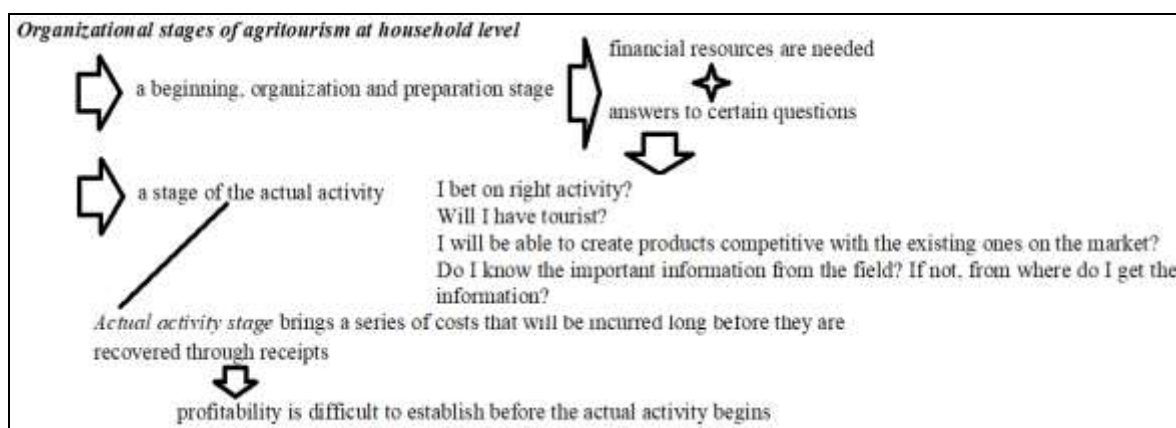


Figure 4. Organizational stages of agritourism at household level

Source: own creation

In the second stage the quality of the accommodation service (if offered) must be highlighted by highlighting the architecture of the place, the construction materials, or, more simply put, the emphasis must be placed on authenticity, simplicity and functionality. If the food service is also offered, the tourists' tastes must be "awakened/stimulated" through local gastronomic products. Obviously, other elements must not be forgotten at this stage, such as: the existing demand on the market for this type of activity/product, the competition represented by other entrepreneurs from the area offering similar products, and last but not least, at least a series of primary calculations related to profitability. The conclusion is thus drawn, from what has been stated above, that the presence of tourist resources in the area is not sufficient to carry out agritourism activity.

CONCLUSIONS

Agritourism can become a driver for rural development, with the condition to be managed responsibly and sustainably, in this sense it is necessary to approach responsibility and innovation in the organization of this sector, the implementation of sustainable practices and effective collaboration between all stakeholders. In our vision, the key factors for the success of agritourism aim at:

1. *Contribution to sustainable development:* Agritourism represents a model of sustainable development for rural communities, simultaneously facilitating the preservation of cultural traditions and the efficient use of local resources. This synergy between tourism and agriculture not only increases the attractiveness of rural destinations but also improves the quality of life of local residents.

2. *Economic benefits:* Diversifying farmers' incomes through agritourism contributes to the economic stability of rural areas. This facilitates the marketing of traditional products and attracts a constant flow of visitors, reducing dependence on conventional agriculture and increasing local investments.

3. *Education and ecological awareness:* Agritourism plays a key role in educating visitors about agricultural processes and the importance of sustainable agriculture. Through direct interaction with producers, tourists gain a deeper appreciation of the ecological and cultural values associated with agriculture.

4. *Social cohesion and community involvement:* Involving locals in agritourism activities promotes community solidarity and strengthens cultural identity. Collaboration between community members to provide tourism services generates a sense of belonging and contributes to the revitalization of local cultures.

5. *Research and innovation*: In-depth studies on the agritourism model can provide valuable insights for innovations in agricultural practices. Interdisciplinary collaboration between experts in agriculture, tourism and the environment is essential for the development of sustainable solutions, adapted to the specific challenges of the area.

6. *Challenges and the need for responsible management*: The main challenges include managing natural resources, the impact of climate change, and maintaining a balance between tourism and agricultural activities. It is crucial to develop management strategies that ensure the long-term sustainability of agritourism while protecting the integrity of the environment.

Concerning the organization of agritourism at the national, local and household levels, on organizational levels, we propose a series of aspects that need to be considered:

1. *At the national level*:

- *Support policies*: The implementation of government policies favorable to agritourism is essential for the development of the sector. These policies should include clear regulations, subsidies for infrastructure development and the promotion of local products on the tourism market.

- *Marketing strategies*: It is important to create a coherent image of national agritourism. Rural tourism promotion campaigns can attract both local and international tourists, highlighting the cultural and natural diversity of the country.

- *Stimulating intersectoral collaboration*: A collaborative framework between the ministries of agriculture, tourism and environment can facilitate the integration of agritourism into national economic development strategies.

2. *At the local level*:

- *Adaptation to community needs*: At local level, the organization of agritourism must reflect the specificities of communities, including traditions and available resources. Promoting specific food products and cultural activities can create an authentic experience for tourists.

- *Community involvement and collaboration*: It is essential that local people are involved in the process of organizing agritourism, ensuring that benefits are redistributed equitably. Collaboration between farmers, artisans and local authorities can improve the agritourism offer.

- *Infrastructure and accessibility*: Investments in infrastructure, such as roads, accommodation and tourist facilities, are crucial for attracting visitors. Accessibility and comfort play an important role in tourists' decisions.

3. *At farm level*:

- *Diversification of activities*: Farms wishing to engage in agritourism should develop diversified activities, such as farm tours, cooking workshops, or harvesting experiences. This can attract a variety of tourists and generate additional income.

- *Quality and sustainability standards*: Maintaining high quality standards and sustainable agricultural practices is essential to attract and retain tourists. Knowledge and application of organic farming methods can add value to the experience offered.

- *Promoting authentic experiences*: Farms should emphasize offering authentic experiences that reflect the local culture. Involving tourists in daily farm activities can enhance the experience and create closer ties between locals and visitors.

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