

Critical evaluation of Agritourism – A Tool for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The paradigm of agritourism has gained remarkable importance in the 21st century. Economists, academicians and travel professionals pinned that agritourism is a concurrent strategy, which not only aims to agricultural development but also delivers positive impacts over environmental, economic and socio – cultural parameters of sustainable tourism. The growth of agritourism can boost the tourism and hospitality industry and can become a medium of change for transforming a developing economy to developed economy. The key objective of this research is to critically discuss and evaluate the notion of agritourism. It also analyzes a link between agritourism and the principles of sustainable development. Additionally, the researcher clears the confusion over the main differences between agritourism, ecotourism and rural tourism. In order to achieve the aim, the researcher performs an exploratory research over the key advantages and challenges of implementing agritourism in developing countries. By realizing the aim of the research, the researcher offers strong recommendations for continual development and smooth implementation of agritourism. Lastly, the researcher identifies limitations of research and guidance for future research.

Keywords: agritourism, sustainable tourism, triple bottom line

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the Tourism and Hospitality industry plays a magnificent role in upliftment of BRICS economies. Tourism helps to increase the GDP of an economy and aims to attract foreign investments, for a better future. However, the actions of mankind have negatively impacted the Mother Nature and have propelled the notion of sustainable development. In simple sense, according to the Brundtland commission, “any development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). In other words, the adequate steps need to be taken by the people maintain balance between environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainability.

The paradigm of agritourism revolves around agriculture and tourism. When these two elements come together, it can become contemporary strategy to deal with the major problems of poverty and conservation of ecological resources. This can only be possible when the tourism is developed over the principle of sustainable development. This paper critically review the conceptual development of agritourism and how it can prove to be tool for sustainable development. It also clears the confusion over key differences between agritourism, rural tourism and ecotourism. Lastly, it infers conclusion and recommendations for continual development the concept and limitations of research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term agritourism is a combination of agricultural activities with tourism. It aims to attract tourist attention over farm accommodation and engages them in the farm-based activities, which explores the rural life; socially and culturally (Olya et al. 2014). Barbieri (2009) pinned that agritourism helps to generate income all year the round. It helps the farmers to be financially **independent** and **reduces the burden** of their debts. Moreover, agritourism is based over market needs and demands, which helps the farmers to directly interact with the travellers and satisfy their needs (Seric et al. 2018). Apart from this, agritourism motivates the farmers to be intact with farming operations and continue their profession with pride, rather than migrating to urban areas (Barbieri 2013; Berlik 2013). Furthermore, the promotion of farm – based activities increases the footfall of the travellers to rural areas and aids to optimum utilization of resources (Pulina et al. 2006).

In order to be precise, Flanigan et al. (2014; 2015) adopted a typology by Phillip, Hunter and Blackstock (2010) and came up with major five types of agritourism.

- Non-working Farm Indirect Interaction Agritourism (NWFII): it is not located on working farms and does not have a direct linkage to agricultural processes, crops or farm animals. However, is related to agriculture or the tradition due to the location or imagery.
- Non-working farm direct interaction agritourism (NWFDI): it is carried out away from the farmlands. For instance, agricultural fairs or shows, heritage farming areas, farmer’s markets.
- Working - farm indirect interaction agritourism (WFII): activities that take place on the farm itself such as traditional agrarian accommodations (farmhouse bed and breakfast), local shops and cafés, outdoor events (horse riding, pumpkin picking), leisure amenities and other tourist attractions.

- Working farm direct staged interaction agritourism (WFDSI): tourists are involved in agriculture through a staged interaction with crops, machines, and farm animals. It can be done through farm tours and open farm setting.
- Working farm direct authentic interaction agritourism (WFDAI): tourists are directly involved in farming practicing for a more authentic experience of agritourism.

In contrast, Chase et al. (2018) developed a conceptual framework, which suggested that agritourism could be categorized into core activities and peripheral activities. While core activities are accepted as agritourism practices, on the other hand peripheral activities are not conventionally included in the scope of agritourism. In simpler sense, the core activities are directly related to the production and marketing of the farm-based products. For instance, the selling of vegetables that were harvested on the farm through farm stands or “pick-your-own” stalls that are situated in the farmland itself. The farm experiences that are directly linked to farm produce such as hayrides, farm tours, farm accommodation and meals and harvest festivals are part of core activities. While the peripheral activities are practiced on the farm but it may not be in direct associated with the production of the farm. For example, if the farm is rented out as a venue for hosting weddings or parties. Certain activities, which are linked with the production but are, carried out away from farmlands such as farmer’s markets (off-farm activities).

Comprehensively, it can inferred (in figure 2.1.) that the practice of agritourism can’t boost direct sales, educate the consumers, provide an opportunity to hosts to be hospitable, provide entertainment through outdoor recreation. These categories of agritourism help overlap the core principles of sustainable development. For instance, the concept of direct sales can boost economic pillar, while the entertainment part can take of socio – cultural parameters which helps to preserve the culture. Outdoor recreation can make the travellers aware about principles of responsible tourism. The hospitality factor not only boot positive social life but also concentrates over customer satisfaction. Lastly, through the area of education, the travellers can be imparted education and can treasure the historical museum and archeological sites for cultural preservation (Chiang 2013).

Seric et al. (2018) stated that agritourism is a catalyst for sustainable rural development. Thus, the concept of agritourism is built on the foundation of the Brundtland report and principles of sustainability to improve the conditions of rural regions (Traunt et al. 2017). Silva et al. (2015) claims that agritourism connects the social, ecological and economical resources in agriculture. Precisely, all the resources have shown an inter-relationship between the three pillars and can be assessed through Triple bottom line of sustainability (Berlik 2013).



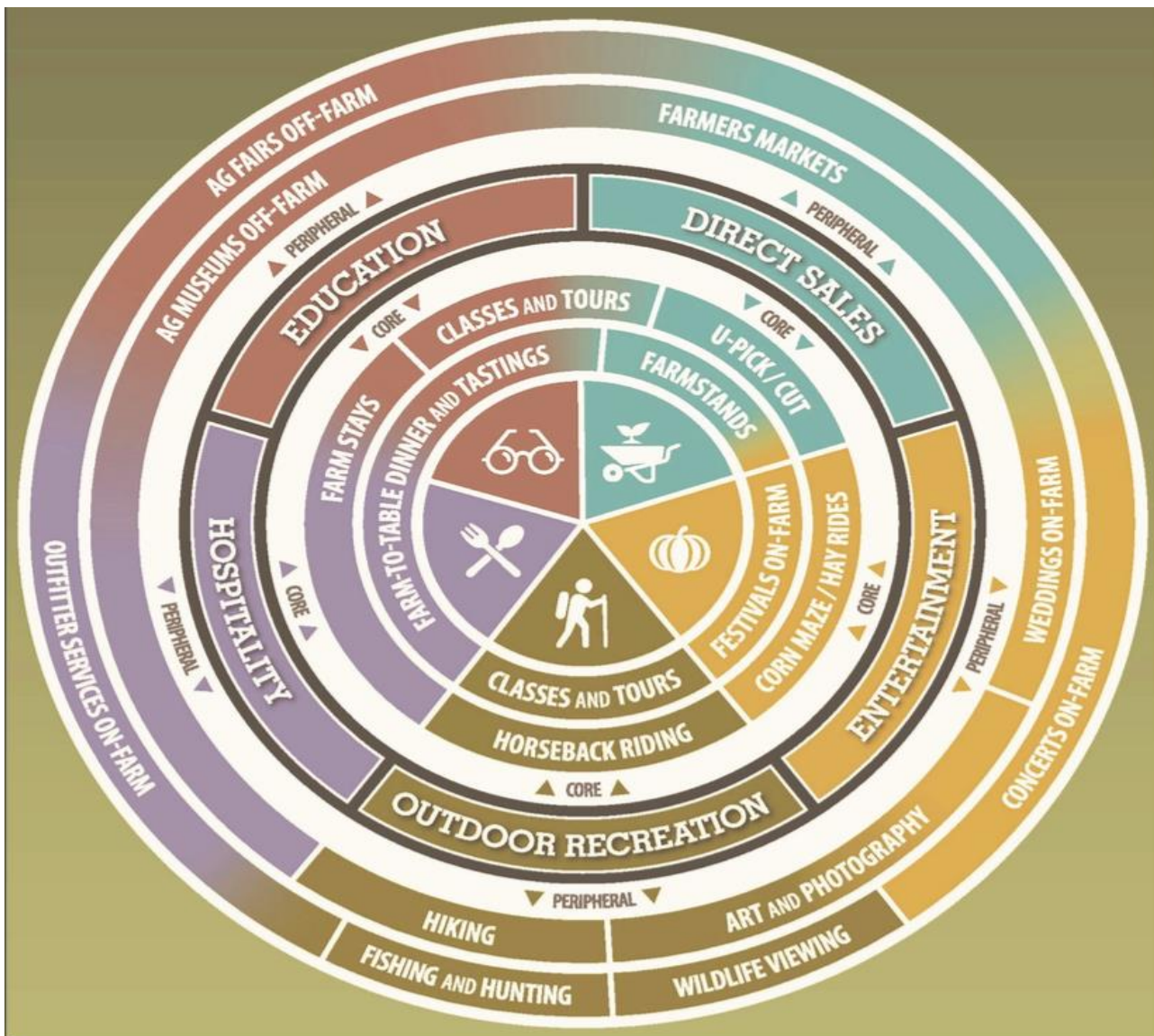


Figure 2.1. Five categories of agritourism

However, few academicians and travel research often relate agritourism with rural and ecotourism. The following table aims to differentiate between the rationales between types of tourism.

Key Points	Agritourism	Rural Tourism	Ecotourism
Meaning	Includes the tourism activities that are associated to agriculture.	Includes all forms of tourism activities that are done in rural regions and among the local communities.	It focuses on the preservation of nature and cultures of a natural territory.
Aim	Activities are aimed at raising awareness about agriculture and farm based activities.	Highlights the rural area setting and the culture.	Tourism is aimed at educating tourists about conserving natural areas.
Scope	It is a part of rural tourism.	Independent activity integrated in the tertiary sector of the economy, alternative form of mass tourism.	“Niche tourism” concept which differs from rural tourism because of the conscious exploitation of natural resources.
Potential tourist	Potential tourists include people that are interested in learning for sustaining the agrarian lifestyle and products.	Potential tourists include individuals that want to experience rural lifestyles.	Potential tourists give importance to meaningful community participation while exploring scenic natural landscapes.
Practiced by	Majorly practiced by farmers as an additional source of income.	Small families own tourism establishments.	Tour operators are local businessmen.

Table 2.1. Comparison between Agritourism, Rural tourism and Ecotourism

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this paper, the researchers **have conducted an** exploratory research, which aims to critically review a given topic and explain its relationship with corresponding variables (Saunders et al. 2012). The key concept of agritourism is critically examined and under the findings it helps to assert the advantages and challenges of implementing agritourism. For this piece of research, the philosophy of positivism taken into consideration for secondary research, as it helps to construct generalization over the subject matter. The secondary data collected from recommended books, journals articles (European Research Studies Journal, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, Journal of Sustainable Development Studies) through research gate, shodhganga, and E – Library of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Scotland. The researcher validated the secondary research by verifying the content validity, through sources and preliminary research of author’s background.

4. DISCUSSION

Based over the secondary research, the researchers attempt to discuss the key advantages of agritourism. According to Myer (2013), agritourism helps to achieve long-term employment at various levels of occupation. Through this employment the rural people also gets an opportunity to be trained and developed their skills, which helps them to enter the labor market and make them independent. Moreover, agritourism creates a positive impact over the mindset of generation Y and Z; it gives them opportunity to diversify the livelihood in rural areas rather than migrating to urban areas (Barbieri 2013). Economically, the farmers or the rural people can come together and develop small sized enterprises, which can aim to promote local production. This production not only limits to agricultural products but also includes artifacts and handicrafts, which indirectly aids to preservation of the ethnic culture of a place (Barbieri 2012). On the wider perspective, the implementation of agritourism projects can promote the quality of living, as the problem of poverty can be reduced. As mass tourism is in great demand, the major concentration over agritourism can help to develop a niche and create new potential market (Mahallyanaarachchi 2015). Furthermore, Carol and Suzanne (2014), stated that agritourism assists in infrastructural development, which not only includes basic services such provision of toilet, LPG, sewage service but also increases the accommodation facilities. Myer (2013), added that agritourism fosters the principle of “Atithi Devo Bhav”, as it increases host and guest interaction and in – return provide authentic rural experience. Additionally, agritourism can also support the principle of ecotourism. In other words, when people travel from one place to another, they need to responsible and make efficient use of natural resources (Barbieri 2013).

On the contrary, the implementation of agritourism can be stressful, if all the key stakeholders are not supportive. The farmers or the local people often face challenge of limited knowledge over working of the tourism industry. Precisely, the people have limited exposure of current tourist demands and lack of entrepreneurial knowledge can result to business failures (Dragoi 2017). Additionally, it is difficult for rural people to obtain funding for their business, whenever, a new business is created, it requires massive funds for marketing and promotion, because it helps to improve visibility (Schilling 2014). Yeboh (2016) added that in order to be hospitable; the farmers need to be empowered which is not possible due to low literacy rate. Owens (2016) pinned that rural areas often get less support from government/ financial institutions for infrastructural development. The agritourism projects can face challenge of authentic reflection of rural life reality because the consumers may not have open mindset of accepting poor hygiene conditions. Moreover, the cultural barriers can act as a major challenge, as the rural people may not understand the guest’s expectation, which can impact the host – tourist phenomenon (Crom 2013). Due to agritourism, there is always a risk of over – exploitation of natural resources by animal exploitation, water and air pollution.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be understood that agritourism is a niche product and have abundance of opportunities to offer. It can be a tool for rural development by keeping in mind the principles of sustainable development. This piece of research shed some light over the conceptual development of the agritourism, which is coinciding the principles of sustainable development. Agritourism have a potential to convert into a mass tourism. As each coin has two sides, even agritourism has advantages and barriers. If these barriers are well addressed and managed, it can bring a revolution in the Tourism industry. Hausler and Kotschi (2011) stated that in order to improvise the current situation, the following strategies could help for continual development and smooth implementation of agritourism.

- Each rural place can come up with an ethnic thematic story, which can grab the attention of the tourist. For instance, promotion of cultural and food through drama/ shows or food festivals.
- The principles of ecotourism can be adopted by combing natural ecosystems and local communities to create memorable experience (Gould 2016)
- The tourist can be explained the concept of ‘farm to plate’. The new generation Y and Z are often keen to know from where does this food come (Chavez 2013)
- Furthermore, a comprehensive tourism product needs to be developed. In simple, people don’t like to visit to one place for only food or nature, they like to visit to a place which has good combination of nature, food, culture and rejuvenating services (Reeder 2012)
- In the current era, it has been proved that women’s are better managers when compared to men, they can be given an opportunity towards agritourism implementation, which will develop their inter – personal skills and make them less dependent. (Bagi 2012)
- As the rural life is governed with gram panchayat, there is a requirement for a leader who can help to bridge the gap between the tourist demands and offerings by the farmers (Pinky 2014).
- On the wider perspective, on the economy level, there is a demand for strategic planning for continual implementation of agritourism. This planning should integrate all the three pillars of sustainability (Broccardo 2017).

Lastly, the researchers would like to highlight the key limitation of this research paper, i.e. primary search, the generalization made over the paper were only based on secondary research and secondly the time – frame for this research was limited only to 15 days. At the end, researchers would like pin that primary research over the topic by comparing two agritourism projects, can help to give a clear picture over the ongoing challenges and advantages.

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