

The Contribution of Agrotourism to the Development of Rural Areas

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Abstract. *This article sets the task of thoroughly analyzing the impact of agritourism on the economic and social development of the village. The main goal of the study is to determine how agritourism affects the economic development of regions, the well-being of the local population and environmental protection. At the same time, the advantages of agritourism over mass tourism and its contribution to sustainable development are analyzed. The research questions provide a basis for determining what benefits agritourism brings to local communities in economic and social terms and to what extent activities in this direction are sustainable in the long term. The methodology of the study is based on an empirical approach. Quantitative and qualitative methods were applied during data collection. A total of 357 respondents were surveyed through a questionnaire. Respondent selection was carried out based on a combination of random and purposive methods. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and comparative analysis methods. The results of the study show that the development of agritourism has a positive impact on the creation of additional jobs in rural areas, the increase in local production and the development of social infrastructure. It was found that attention to environmental protection has increased and the cultural values of the local population are actively promoted. The results also show that proper management of agrotourism facilitates the application of the principles of sustainable development. The originality of the study is due to the fact that the development potential of agrotourism in Azerbaijan is assessed on the basis of empirical data. The results of the study provide practical recommendations for tourism managers, local governments and business entities. This article contributes to the decision-making process related to planning and management of tourism development in rural areas.*

Keywords: *agrotourism, rural tourism, agriculture, local population, sustainable development, environment*

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Aqroturizmin kənd ərazilərinin inkişafına töhfəsi

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Xülasə. *Bu məqalədə aqroturizmin kəndin iqtisadi və sosial inkişafına təsirini əsaslı şəkildə təhlil etmək vəzifəsi qarşıya qoyulur. Tədqiqatın əsas məqsədi aqroturizmin regionların iqtisadi inkişafına, yerli əhalinin rifahına və ətraf mühitin mühafizəsinə necə təsir etdiyini müəyyən etməkdir. Eyni zamanda, aqroturizmin kütləvi turizmə görə üstünlükləri və davamlı inkişafa verdiyi töhfələr təhlil*

olunur. Tədqiqat sualları aqroturizmin yerli icmalar üçün iqtisadi və sosial baxımdan hansı faydalar gətirdiyini və bu istiqamətdə fəaliyyətin uzunmüddətli dövrdə nə dərəcədə davamlı olmasını müəyyən etməyə əsas yaradır. Tədqiqatın metodologiyası empirik yanaşmaya əsaslanır. Məlumat toplanması zamanı kəmiyyət və keyfiyyət üsulları tətbiq edilmişdir. Sorğu anketi vasitəsilə ümumilikdə 357 respondent arasında sorğu keçirilmişdir. Respondent seçimi təsadüfi və məqsədli üsulların kombinasiyası əsasında həyata keçirilmişdir. Yığılan məlumatlar deskriptiv statistik təhlil və müqayisəli təhlil metodları ilə analiz edilmişdir. Araşdırmanın nəticələri göstərir ki, aqroturizmin inkişafı kənd ərazilərində əlavə iş yerlərinin açılmasına, yerli istehsalın artmasına və sosial infrastrukturun inkişafına müsbət yöndə təsir edir. Ətraf mühitin mühafizəsinə diqqətin artdığı və yerli əhalinin mədəni dəyərlərinin aktiv formada təbliğ olunduğu müəyyən edilmişdir. Həmçinin nəticələr onu göstərir ki, aqroturizmin düzgün idarəçiliyi davamlı inkişafın prinsiplərinin tətbiqini asanlaşdırır. Tədqiqatın orijinallığı onunla bağlıdır ki, Azərbaycanda aqroturizmin inkişaf potensialı empirik məlumatlar əsasında qiymətləndirilir. Tədqiqatın nəticələri praktiki baxımdan turizm idarəçiləri, yerli özünüidarəetmə orqanları və sahibkarlıq subyektləri üçün zəruri tövsiyələr təqdim edir. Bu məqalə kənd ərazilərində turizmin inkişafının planlaşdırılması və idarə olunması ilə bağlı qərarvermə prosesinə töhfə verir.

Açar sözlər: aqroturizm, kənd turizmi, kənd təsərrüfatı, yerli əhali, davamlı inkişaf, ətraf mühit

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Introduction

The organization of tourism in rural areas increases the recognition of these places, strengthens their economic well-being and affects the rise of the social status of the local population. In general, the organization of recreation in rural areas means getting away from the hustle and bustle of the city and entering a different environment.

The concepts of “countryside” and “village” usually evoke similar images: meadows, mountains, forests, rivers, villages, domestic animals, farmland, gardens, dirt roads and sparse population. When a person moves away from his permanent place of residence - whether to megacities, villages, rocky, desert or green areas - he enters a different environment. He wants to feel this difference, even for a short time.

Mass tourism is a form of tourism characterized by the simultaneous visit of large groups of people to popular tourist attractions. This type of tourism includes standard package tours aimed at a wide audience, and local features are often not taken into account. Istanbul, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Antalya, Paris, Singapore and other cities are popular destinations for this type of tourism. Mass tours mainly include excursion routes and visits to museums and famous man-made monuments.

Some tour operators organize hikes for tourists on foot, by bicycle, by motorbike, or by horse in natural areas, which creates a completely different experience. Participation of city dwellers in such hikes leads to their direct contact with the beauty of the green environment, as well as to their being more active in nature conservation.

Tourists passing through rural areas communicate with local residents and mutual impressions are exchanged. In recent years, tour operators in Azerbaijan have been organizing hiking tours in various regions of the country. The purpose of these tours is for our citizens to get to know not only the fascinating nature of our country, but also the historical monuments located in these areas. This communication is carried out both on a spiritual and material level.

As the local population's interest in rural tourism activities increases, their attention to environmental protection also increases. Valuing local resources creates a desire in rural communities to expand tourism activities in the future. Because tourists prefer well-preserved, uniquely attractive and properly marked areas. Nature and culture are the main components of tourism. Agritourism is geographically linked to specific areas. Therefore, the development of theoretical and methodological foundations for its development requires the definition of the concept of "agritourism" in a conceptual framework that is consistent with regional conditions and socio-economic prerequisites (Pecheritsa & Shevchenko, 2012).

In the experience of foreign countries, the concept of agritourism often appears as a synthesis of various, broad, and sometimes contradictory definitions (Pecheritsa & Shevchenko, 2012). The demands and lifestyle of agritourists have changed. They now prefer establishments that offer a variety of activities and services, based more on local characteristics and individual experiences (ISMEA, 2023). Tourism has been considered as an integral part of state strategies for solving development problems in rural areas for many years. Civelek and Karadağ (2020) note that the valuable contribution of tourism has encouraged state institutions to consider rural tourism as an alternative to mass "sun and beach" tourism.

According to the World Tourism Organization, rural tourism is a type of tourism activity where the visitor's experience is linked to a wide range of products related to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle and culture, fishing, and visiting places of interest (World Tourism Organization, 2019). If we understand rural tourism as the sum of all recreational activities carried out in rural areas and based on elements of rural culture, then agrotourism is a form of rural tourism in which these elements are to some extent related to agricultural practices (Sayadi & Calatrava, 2001).

Agrotourism is a sustainable and alternative form of tourism based on both modern and traditional agriculture. Tourists can participate in various agricultural activities in direct contact with nature by staying in rural houses and guesthouses. Agrotourism also revitalizes the economy in rural areas and contributes to regional development (Civelek & Karadağ, 2020). In order to attract tourists to rural areas, it is important to organize rural product festivals and actively promote agrotourism, as these initiatives increase visibility, increase visitor interest and increase the overall attractiveness of rural areas.

According to Phillip et al. (2010), the first experience that comes to mind when discussing agrotourism activities is participating in activities carried out on an agricultural or farm. Second, tourists must participate in the activities directly, indirectly, or passively. Direct experiences include milking and harvesting; indirect experiences include preparing or selling food; and passive experiences include activities that take place off the farm. Third, it is important for tourists to feel a sense of authenticity in their agricultural experiences, as genuine interactions with local culture, farming practices, and rural lifestyles significantly enhance the overall quality and credibility of agritourism activities.

Ramos et al. (2017) confirm that agritourism is a sub-segment of rural tourism and is mainly carried out on farms. This type of tourism allows tourists to directly participate in agricultural activities and aims to attract visitors who value cultivated landscapes in particular. For agrotourism to be successful, efficient, profitable and competitive organic agriculture must be carried out. Also, specific routes and

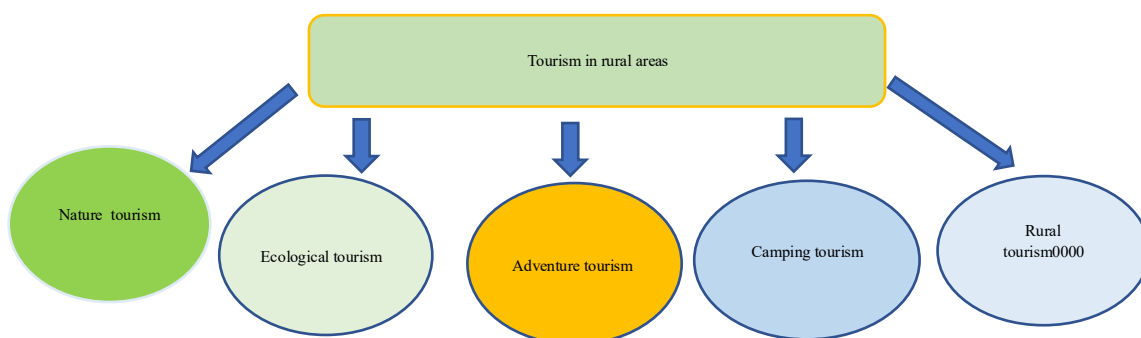
signage systems must be organized based on proper planning and organizational work. Other authors also associate agritourism with tourists working in agricultural enterprises. These include Telfer and Wall (2000), Williams et al. (2001), Sonnino (2004), Sayadi & Calatrava (2001) and others. It is clear that tourists do not receive any salary in exchange for the work they do and the products they obtain. In return, they are provided with food and accommodation by the farm owner. Agritourism is a form of tourism that involves spending time in a different environment, participating in the processes of growing, harvesting, processing and selling fruits and vegetables. A city dweller who voluntarily (without pay) participates in agricultural work gains certain skills and in return is provided with accommodation and food. The authenticity of the activities, the tourists' authentic perception of agricultural experiences and the opportunity to directly participate in real agricultural work are considered to be the main features of agritourism (Civelek et al., 2014). According to the Working Farm, Direct Contact, Authentic (WFDCA) concept, in agritourism tourists directly experience physical agricultural activities: for example, "pick-your-own" farms or participation in farm work. Phillip et al. (2010) agree with other researchers that this type of agritourism goes beyond the usual tourist environment and enters the "backstage" of agriculture (MacCannell, 1973). The products and activities in this category have been less studied in the literature than other types. One example is WWOOFing (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms), where tourists work on a farm in exchange for accommodation and often food (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). The labor-intensive nature of organic farming creates a large opportunity for WFDCA agritourism.

Methodology

In the research process, quantitative research methods based on an empirical approach were used to study the interest and trends in agritourism. Data collection was carried out using a survey method. The survey was conducted with the participation of a total of 357 respondents, which created a sufficient basis for conducting initial statistical generalizations. The selection of respondents formed a heterogeneous structure, covering different age groups, different areas of employment and places of residence. This approach allowed for a comparative analysis of the attitude of individual socio-demographic groups to agritourism. The questions used in the survey were closed and semi-closed and covered the level of general interest in agritourism, attitude to volunteer work on farms, types of activities that are most interested in rural areas, and directions for proposals for the development of agritourism. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (grouping, percentages and frequency distribution). The results were visualized and interpreted in the form of diagrams. Also, some behavioral differences were identified by applying the comparative analysis method across age groups. The theoretical generalization method was also used in the research. The empirical results obtained were compared with relevant scientific approaches.

Tourism in rural areas

Tours organized in the provinces differ in content (scheme 1).



Scheme 1

During nature tours, people often do not take into account the ecological and economic impact they have on the environment by participating in activities such as hunting, fishing, rafting, hiking. During ecological tours, tourists immerse themselves in the mysterious beauty of nature, gain some information about flora and fauna, participate in tree planting or environmental cleaning campaigns. Ecotourism distinguishes itself by its environmental protection and study (research), as well as research activities. Adrenaline-seeking tourists overcome rocky terrain and difficult routes during adventure tours. Tourists staying in camps usually participate in hikes in various directions during their stay (on foot, with animals, by bicycle and motorcycle). Rural tourism, on the other hand, is completely different from all these types of tourism listed. The main function of rural tourism is to effectively improve the psychological and physical condition of a person.

Among the economic functions, the following should be especially noted:

- Creation of a sales market for specific resources belonging to rural areas.
- This creates financial resources for market activities and stimulates the economic development of rural areas.

The main reason why city dwellers choose to relax in the countryside is the desire to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city and explore the vast expanses of the countryside.

How many places can a villager offer a tourist to spend the night?

Part of the house where a village family lives:

- 1, 2, 3 rooms or 1 floor;
- A separate building built in the yard.

What services can tourists (family, friends, group mates) take advantage of when staying with a village family?

In the house, they can use the rooms provided for overnight stays and use household appliances. In the courtyard, tourists can relax, enjoy shaded areas decorated with roses, or use recreational facilities designed for children. Such arrangements provide both comfort and an immersive experience of village life for visitors.

Tourists pay the host for the services provided.

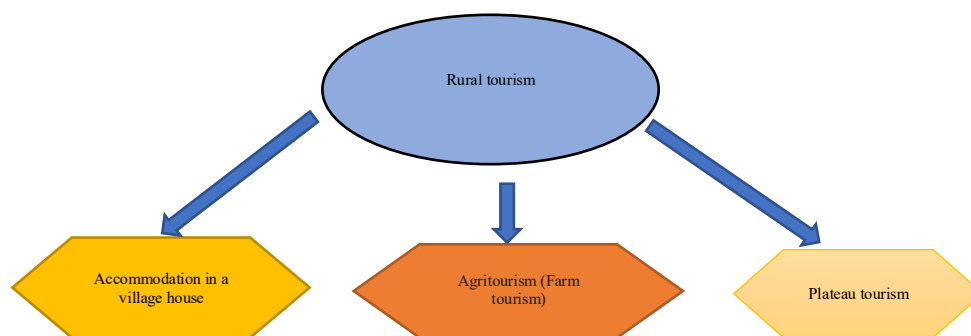
Tourists often want to volunteer to care for the pets kept by the village family and to tend to the plants grown in the garden, and in most cases, the host is positive about this.

Advantages for tourists

- They get away from the noise of cities and the polluted atmosphere created by industrial enterprises and cars.
- They eat food made from natural products. They gain a different life experience by living in accordance with the environment and daily lifestyle of a village family.
- They get acquainted with examples of local cuisine.
- They closely study the lifestyle and traditions of the village population, and observe local life from the inside.
- They establish closer contact with nature by participating in activities such as nature walks, hiking, fishing, and horse riding.
- They get acquainted with local culture, customs, and folklore heritage.
- They broaden their worldview and increase their knowledge about different cultures and lifestyles.

Benefits for local villagers

- Awareness increases: In order to improve the quality of services provided to tourists, villagers gain additional knowledge about the history, cultural life and traditions of their villages and regions. This creates conditions for the preservation and revival of local customs.
- Ecological awareness: Villagers begin to pay more attention to environmental protection.
- Expanding worldview: Communication with tourists leads to an increase in the knowledge and experience of villagers.
- Additional income: A new source of income is created.
- Attention to ecology: Local residents are more sensitive to the ecological balance, since a violation can lead to a decrease in the flow of tourists.
- Increased employment: The expansion of services for tourists increases employment in the village. As the economic opportunities of the villagers increase, their social situation also improves, and their chosen lifestyle, cultural values, and leisure time organization become richer and more meaningful. Recreation organized in the village family and in the village space can be divided into 3 groups (scheme 2).



Scheme 2

The above information is about the tourist's stay in a rural guesthouse and the benefits he gets from it. Agrotourism - as a broader service area - involves the voluntary participation of tourists in the activities of agricultural (farm) farms. Agritourism, as a branch of rural tourism, is characterized by the voluntary labor activities of tourists on rural farms. The systematic explanation of the concept of "agritourism" is based on the concepts of both "tourism" and "agriculture". In Italy, at a time when both domestic and foreign tourists are making higher demands, there is a need to specialize in agritourism and provide more services. In this context, training plays an important strategic role - the development of skills in this area is required in order to be able to respond professionally and efficiently to market demands. Agrotourism is the most widespread form of diversification in agriculture and has developed widely in rural areas, socio-economically disadvantaged areas, mountainous areas and small settlements in Italy (ISMEA, 2024). Although it has similarities with rural tourism and farm tourism, agritourism includes agricultural activities, such as viticulture, in its environment. On the other hand, rural tourism and farm tourism can also include camping, handicraft fairs, safari tours, adventure sports, hiking routes and other tourism activities carried out in rural areas (Şanlıer & Gazelci, 2024). As can be seen, numerous types of services are offered to tourists who choose the village as a recreation destination. In general, it can be noted that agritourism creates diversification and additional income opportunities for rural family farms, which has a positive impact on increasing employment and economic development in rural areas. This has also been defined as an explicit objective in various support programs (Deutsch-Russischer Agrarpolitischer Dialog, 2020). Some researchers have suggested that farm tours, which are conducted on working farms and allow tourists to participate directly in agricultural activities, are an authentic model of

agritourism. In this case, tourists contribute labor to the farm in exchange for accommodation and food (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006).

Tourists' grouping by recreational purpose

Tourists who relax in rural areas can be divided into two groups according to their purpose:

1. Simply staying in a village house and enjoying the hospitality of the host

This includes:

- overnight stay,
- meals,
- getting to know the courtyard and the village environment,
- walking around the village and its surroundings,
- observing the lifestyle of a village family.

2. Volunteering in agriculture

Motives can be varied:

- a) To experience agriculture from the inside for a certain period of time
- b) To learn the dialect of the local population (philological research)
- c) To learn or improve German, English, Italian, etc. languages, local dialects
- d) To get acquainted with the agricultural production process of the local population (planting, harvesting, processing, sales; viticulture, grain growing, rice growing, fruit growing, etc.)
- e) Other reasons.

Unlike group 1 tourists, group 2 tourists are provided with accommodation and food because they work voluntarily in agriculture.

Tourists who stay in a village house for the sole purpose of recreation do not follow a regime - they eat when they want, go where they want. Agrotourists, on the other hand, must adhere to a certain regime. Because they are obliged to follow the instructions of the farm owner: in which field, with what tool, and for how many hours they will work, they are informed in advance. If the requirements are not met, the farm owner either demands a service fee from the tourist or removes him from the farm. Not every tourist wants to spend his entire vacation in a cotton field, tea plantation or apple orchard. As a rule, a tourist is content with 2–4–7 days of activity and gets the necessary impression.

The role of state support in the development of agritourism

The role of agritourism is particularly emphasized in the Italian General Strategic Partnership Plan for 2023–2027. The implementation of this plan envisages increasing the attractiveness of the region, increasing the demand for ecosystem services and increasing employment by strengthening the multifunctionality of agriculture (ISMEA, 2023). Rural product festivals and the promotion of agritourism are important for the promotion of agricultural products.

Highland tourism

One of the most interesting areas of rural tourism is highland tourism.

Highlands are economic areas located outside permanent settlements where people engage in animal husbandry and agriculture. Some are collectively owned by communities, while others are state-owned. From a socio-economic perspective, highlands are a complementary part of the agricultural economy (Çalık et al., 2021). Living with shepherds for a while, observing their lifestyle, looking at animals, and spending leisure time in a different environment are some of the main aspects of this type of tourism.

To accommodate volunteers, the farm must be provided with a certain infrastructure: accommodation, conditions for participation in agricultural work, food opportunities, necessary facilities for training

in agricultural activities. Modern agrotourists now prefer farms that offer a wider range of activities and personalized experiences (ISMEA, 2023). The farm owner may not always be satisfied with the work of the tourist. Dissatisfaction arises between the parties when the tourist does not perform the work assigned to him with the required quality. Situations such as the sound of agricultural machinery in the early morning, the smell of fertilizer or the application of pesticides sometimes lead to disputes. To overcome these difficulties, it is important for farm owners to be patient and sensitive to the expectations of guests (Deutsch-Russischer Agrarpolitischer Dialog, 2020). Tourism related to agriculture is very little used in Azerbaijan. In many foreign countries, agrotourism is a fairly mature tourism sector. It has gone through certain stages of development and formation, and therefore can be a necessary and valuable example for the development of agrotourism in Azerbaijan. As an alternative form of tourism, agrotourism is considered a deeper category within rural tourism and is a type of tourism of particular interest. Agriculture offers a significant opportunity in responding to consumers' demand for fresh, minimally processed, healthy, ethically and sustainably produced foods that are beneficial to their quality of life and health. Agrotourists take advantage of these opportunities.

Rural tourism or the development of tourism in a rural environment?

Some of the main questions here may be:

1. What are the farmer's motives?
 - a. Economic?
 - b. Communication with new people and perhaps broadening their worldview?
2. What are the motives of a rural tourist?
 - a. A different environment and experiencing rural life here,
 - b. Communication with people with different views,
 - c. Broadening their worldview.

Unlike a hotel, the accommodation provided in a rural guesthouse can meet simple elementary requirements. The European Rural Tourism Association has adopted certain standards for rural guesthouses. However, rural guesthouses do not always meet these standards. This is because not every homeowner can fully adapt his house or part of his house to the conditions that will meet certain standards. Perhaps, since the conditions in rural guesthouses are non-standard, they create opportunities for tourists to get closer to rural life.

In Spain, state support for the development of agritourism has not been in line with the initial plan of community institutions to promote rural tourism as a source of additional income for farmers (Pulido & Cárdenas, 2011). Instead, it has continued to favor the idea of tourism as a source of foreign exchange by attracting as many tourists as possible without considering the environmental or social costs (Espinosa & Aldana, 2023). However, by the beginning of the century, tourism had started to show undesirable results. This was due to the fact that in many cases the projects were not related to agriculture, but rather were foreign investments based on seasonal businesses that did not benefit local communities. Many public and private strategies for rural tourism focused on increasing short-term supply without taking into account territorial imbalances, supply quality and long-term sustainability of the product (Cánoves et al., 2012). In this context, according to studies carried out in Spain, despite the increase in the number of tourists and overnight stays in rural areas in the last two decades, the average annual occupancy rate remained around 20% and the average length of stay barely exceeded three nights. In this case, it can be concluded that rural tourism has not reached the level of mass tourism. However, the absence of mass tourism in rural tourism is a key attractive factor for this type of tourism. In Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Agriculture has implemented projects to attract rural residents to tourism activities (Dövlət Turizm Agentliyi, t.y.) and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population has implemented projects to support individual entrepreneurship, including the expansion of rural tourism activities. Within the framework of these projects, household appliances and household equipment were provided to rural residents who wanted to receive tourists and provide them with accommodation and food services. However, no information was provided to a wide audience about the number of tourists received as a result of these projects and the volume of

services provided to them. In particular, it is impossible to obtain information about the number of tourists involved in agricultural work.

Promotion of rural tourism

The development of rural tourism helps to prevent the complete abandonment of local populations from their regions – especially mountainous, rocky and saline areas – and at the same time contributes to the preservation and protection of local customs and traditions. In order to promote rural tourism, it is necessary to activate sectoral policies and fulfill certain tasks. These tasks include the following:

- Ensuring full access to the transport network;
 - Increasing interest in natural areas and protected areas, making them more accessible for tourism;
 - Creating an internet and information technology infrastructure in these regions;
 - Improving the marketing skills of agricultural producers and expanding access to local markets so that accommodation and public catering establishments can easily obtain the necessary local products.
- In order to promote tourism and attract tourists – both in groups and individually – to certain areas, it is necessary to continuously prioritize the installation of road signs leading to anthropogenic and natural objects, the placement of information boards in cultural and natural sites, the construction of roads, the implementation of marketing activities and the improvement of the quality of services provided in rural tourism in general. It is also important to follow European trends in this area and apply benchmarking techniques (Karpenko et al., 2017).

Another factor – geographical indications – makes an important contribution to the development of agrotourism. Products registered with a geographical indication are distinguished both in terms of standardization and in terms of production characteristics specific to the region. Therefore, agricultural products identified with geographical indications support agrotourism. In addition, geographical indications play an important role in the formation of the gastronomic identity of the region through the cultivation, marketing and registration of products specific to the region (Şanlier & Gazelci, 2024). Conducting surveys on rural tourism among broad segments of the population is itself an option for promoting rural tourism. Thus, the results of the survey conducted by us were as follows:

A total of 357 people participated in the survey. Participants covered a wide range of age, place of residence, and work activities. 180 people answered “yes” to the question “Are you interested in volunteering on a farm during your vacation in the countryside?” (Chart 1).

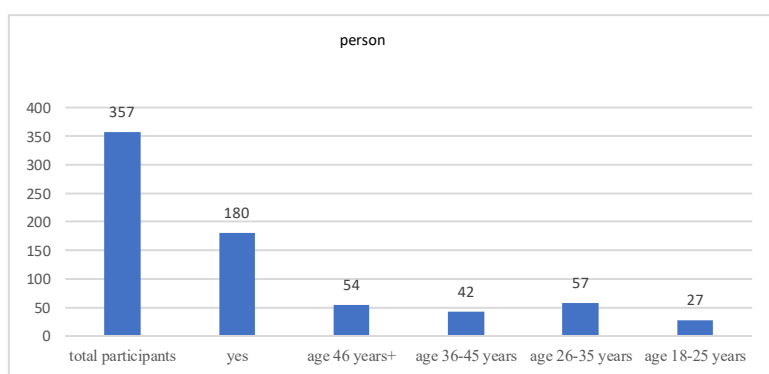


Chart 1

Those interested in volunteering on a farm during their vacation in the countryside

As can be seen from the diagram, out of 180 people who want to volunteer on a farm, the share of those under 25 years of age is lower among those who say “yes” overall. Those over 26 years of age prefer this activity more.

Although the survey participants did not want to volunteer on a farm, they noted that they would like to participate in fruit picking and take care of animals for a short period of time. 118 of the participants answered “yes” to the question “does a vacation in a country house attract you?” 84 people indicated “agriculture” to the question “your main area of interest.” The main results of the survey are reflected in the following diagrams:

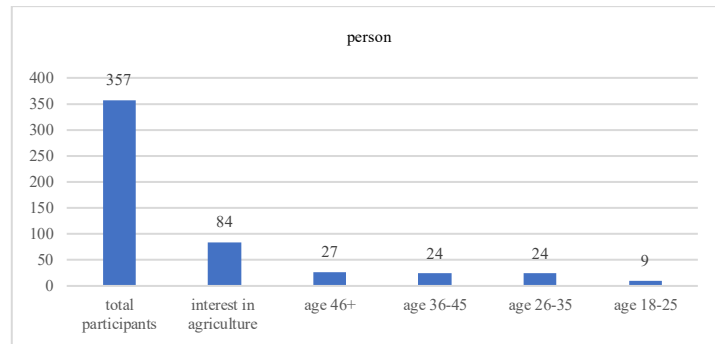


Chart 2

The main area of interest when relaxing in a country house

When answering the survey questions, participants indicated a preference for "nature" (92 people), "tranquility" (88 people), and "rural culture" (39 people) as their main areas of interest, in addition to "interest in agriculture". Preferred activity when relaxing in a country house.

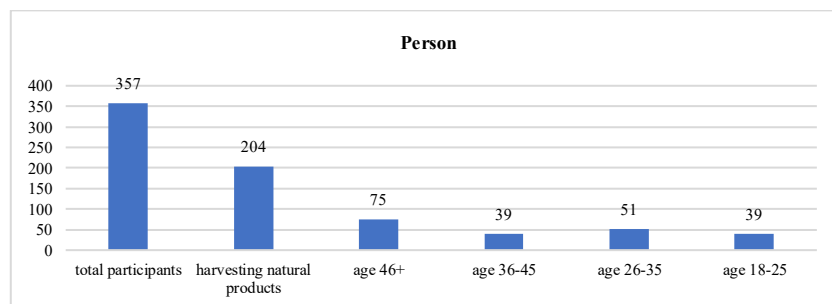


Chart 3

Preferred activity when relaxing in a country house

When asked “What activities do you prefer to do while relaxing in a rural house?”, 204 people answered “collecting natural products.” At the same time, as passive activities, survey participants noted “handicrafts” (33 people) and “hiking in nature” (117 people). There were various answers to the question “What are your suggestions for developing rural tourism?”. These mainly include: landscaping of rural areas, state support, education of rural residents (on tourist services), advertising, installation of signs in the direction of rural guest houses. Survey participants particularly emphasized the improvement of road infrastructure in rural areas. The region should constantly offer new values. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop attractive criteria that meet the needs of target groups. The smaller the region, the more unique and original the proposals should be. Exoticism is one of the main criteria for attracting tourists (Yusupov, 2021). Municipalities and state agencies should encourage the creation of rural tourism associations and organize training in this direction. State support programs are of great importance in stimulating private household investment in the tourism sector. The accommodation offered in rural houses can vary in terms of form, amenities, and comfort level. Before choosing a place to stay, each tourist receives detailed information about the amenities offered here. Usually, tourists have a certain impression of hotel rooms: comfortable beds, tables, chairs, bathrooms, televisions, Wi-Fi, and other services. Virtual reality technologies are interesting not only

for young people who are constantly interacting with virtual reality, but also for the older generation due to their high mobility and convenience (Liu et al., 2026). At the same time, the amenities offered in rural guest houses can be completely different. These amenities range from VIP-level accommodations to overnight stays in haylofts or the simplest, most minimal amenities. Stays in haylofts usually last 1–2 nights and rarely last longer. Rural houses with the simplest living conditions are often rented by city dwellers for the entire summer season. The main requirements are that the bed and bathroom facilities are clean and tidy, and that the kitchen equipment is in working order. One of the forms of agrotourism is one-day trips organized by tour operators for tourists to agricultural enterprises. At this time, tourists participate in the harvest, helping the farmer for 1–2 hours, and at the same time buying the products they have collected for themselves and taking them home. Such tours are widespread in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

Agrotourism is becoming more and more important every day — it contributes to the development of villages, combines agriculture, culture and ecology, and is easily integrated with other types of tourism. For the successful operation of a business, it is necessary to comprehensively use marketing tools, from basic surveys to conducting marketing research using SWOT analysis, PEST analysis and other methods to identify customer preferences. Unlike mass tourism, agrotourism is carried out in small groups and usually brings great benefits to the local population. In this regard, agrotourism, which is a form of sustainable tourism, is considered an important tool for the development of villages, especially by improving the income and socio-cultural conditions of the local community in the area. Agrotourism is becoming more and more important every day and attracts attention mainly due to its contribution to the development of rural areas and the unique activities it encompasses. It is closely related to culture, nature and the environment, is integrated with agriculture, embodies cultural values and can be easily combined with other forms of tourism. In short, agrotourism is a branch of rural tourism. The word "agro" is a shortened form of the words "agronomic" or "agriculture". It is derived from the Greek word *agronomos*, where *agros* means "field, land" and *nomos* means "law, administration". The term "agro" has the same meaning in almost all languages and is used to describe agricultural activities. In simple terms, if you see a word starting with "agro", know that it is directly related to working with the land and producing food.

Main features of agrotourism

- Accommodation: Overnight stay on a working farm or with a rural family.
- Active participation: Direct involvement of tourists in agricultural activities.
- Authenticity: Experiencing real rural life.
- Educational function: Increasing knowledge about the nature of food production and agricultural labor.

As a result, agrotourism is not only a replacement of the urban environment with the rural environment, but also an opportunity to enter a unique lifestyle, try out the role of a farmer and gain new knowledge.

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