

Article

Agritourism—A Business Reality of the Moment for Romanian Rural Area's Sustainability

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Abstract: The agritourism activity can be a characteristic reality of the present, considering rural area's sustainability, being at the same time a business reality for rural entrepreneurs and a "must have" for rural communities that have tourism potential. It is a form of tourism, through which the tourist can receive a qualitative product at a reasonable price, but also a field that can ensure sustainable development over time, being at the same time environmentally friendly. The purpose of this scientific paper is to identify the aspects that make agritourism "a possible business reality of the moment", for Romanian rural area's sustainability. We take into account the following areas: Bran-Moieciu area—considered "the oldest" in terms of agritourism experience, and Apuseni Mountains area, with a great inclination and potential for this activity. The study conducted for these two areas is focused on several aspects: the degree of involvement in agritourism activities, considering the number of years and managerial experience, the analysis of the types of activities/experiences offered by agritourism structures, the identification of the main reasons/motivations for the orientation towards agritourism and the manner in which this field is perceived. Aspects related to the marketing-finance part of the agritourism business are also taken into account: customers, distribution channels, financial sources, shortcomings observed by agritourism business owners and possible action directions so as to improve the activity/agritourism product. Agritourism may be "a possible business reality of the moment" for the studied areas and not only, but in the future, the entrepreneur/farmer must be constantly updated because of the changing situations that appear on the market, be able to make sustainable decisions for his/her own business, which in the future will ensure its viability and obviously its long-term profitability and development, and in the same time rural area's sustainability.

Keywords: agritourism; business reality; rural area; sustainability



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1. Introduction

In European countries, agritourism appeared in Europe around the 1960s, as a tourism offer and it became a priority in the last decades of this century, in local development policies, as an activity that links the economic components of sustainability with local communities. Specialists consider these rural communities to be a real success in the future when referring to agritourism activities, for multiple reasons: [1–4] in Europe, the aging of the population leads to an increase in the number of tourists of the third and fourth age, who are attracted by this form of tourism; the interest in environmental and health issues is increasing; the persons from urban areas take short vacations, therefore they want destinations that are easy to find and also convenient from a financial point of view; and the number of those who want a quiet tourist area in an unpolluted environment is increasing as well. Most likely, in the current pandemic context, the possibility of carrying out tourist

activities, at a smaller size, and, at the same time, with a higher degree of protection, could be added.

It can be stated that nowadays there has been a massive awareness regarding the importance of the rural environment, which comes from both the locals and the authorities, and it represents a beneficial aspect. The awareness regarding the significance of rural areas comes primarily from the European authorities, based on the fact that rural and intermediate areas represent 88% of the EU territory, and they are inhabited by 55% of its total population, producing 43% of the Gross Value Added of EU and accounting for 56% of all jobs from the Union [5]. Therefore they are very important when it comes to supporting rural development. But the awareness of the importance of the rural environment is also emphasized by the locals, of course together with its strengths, but also with the specific disadvantages and difficulties. In fact, the European authorities, and not only them, began to “see the importance of the rural environment”; however the problems that remained unsolved could cause major imbalances. We refer here to the fact that the public awareness about the significance of rural areas is based on several aspects from which the concern has started to begun [6]:

- it is still struggling with a serious recession following the economic crisis that has affected agriculture;
- it have arisen several problems, such as: the problem of depopulation in many rural areas, or the one of an increasingly aging population, and the disqualification of the labor force;
- the lack of interest from the younger generations in starting activities specific to the rural environment, especially agriculture, although there are many areas with remarkable resources that could ensure their sustainable development in terms of activities, other than agriculture (agritourism activities for example);
- the need to preserve and revitalize the traditional cultural characteristics of rural areas, and the qualities of their natural environment, as important elements of local identity and as sustainable places to live and work.

Starting from the aspects, which generate this awareness and concern about the significance of rural areas, it is possible to support the need to ensure its sustainable development. This need depends on how to find intelligent ways to develop, so as to be an innovative manner to integrate and correlate more structures/domains from rural areas that support innovation in integrated non-agricultural activities by enabling the development of territory from several points of view. On the background of this awareness there comes the need of identifying alternatives for sustainable use of resources, in order to ensure the future development of these communities, and one of these alternatives may be agritourism [7,8]. “Why agritourism activity?” might be the right question (see Figure 1). A possible answer might be: because this form of tourism can combine several activities (agricultural activities, craft, and gastronomic activities). Another possible answer might be: because agritourism can capitalize at the same time tourist resources, agricultural resources, economic resources, whose combination supports the future development of the rural environment. The agritourism activity is therefore a complex one; its components are closely linked to each other, in a certain inter-conditional relationship, similar to a cybernetic system [9]. Certain components are essential and at the same time they determine the agritourism activity: the territory represents the “raw material” for agritourism; the agritourism product obtained must be original and qualitative; and last but not least, the people responsible for carrying out this activity, namely the farmers [10,11].

In terms of sustainability, agritourism might represent an innovative and diversified direction, a modern business for farms but also for the rural environment, because [12–15]:

- Agritourism, as an activity, has offered the possibility of returning to the roots, which brought its stabilization as a tourist offer on the market, especially among people from urban areas. An attractive form of tourism was obtained starting from the special resources, adding the farmer’s effort to offer accommodation in rural areas and products from his own production, but also adding the possibility to find out about

the way the ancestors lived. A contact between the tourist and the local population is ensured following the development of the agritourism activity, namely a relationship between two different environments/civilizations/cultures, which can generate, besides a friendship, a possible future collaboration, or a certain “grinding” of the locals. It can also be claimed that the farmer acquires a new qualification and various skills from working with tourists [16–18]. The tourist also gains from the contact with the rural environment, firstly by knowing about the specific way of life, from which subsequently derives a greater appreciation of the authenticity, naturalness of the products from this environment, and why not for the work of the rural people.

- Also the period of difficulty, through which the agricultural sector, has passed and is passing in many developing areas, rich in terms of rural resources, is a motivation for the development of agritourism, where there are favorable conditions. Because many of the entrepreneurs, from the agricultural field, did not have where to market the obtained products, it was necessary to diversify the possibilities of direct marketing, agritourism was representing such a possibility. Combining the two activities, agriculture and tourism, under the concept of agritourism, has generated the opportunity for a sustainable development of the rural community, over a longer period of time, and it generates at the same time the growth of other local businesses. Consequently, the actions are first in the direction of an economic development of the community. After increasing incomes, investments will increase as well, which will generate the expansion of economic activities in rural areas, but also the emergence of new businesses, which as a whole, will support local industry. Another aspect will be the intensification of trade due to tourists, which will generate a future direction of investment earnings, primarily in improving living conditions, or various facilities. The localities within which agritourism activities appear and are practiced, will take an important step in the direction of a sustainable future development [19–21]. The current trend, specific to many rural areas, implies a sharp decline from an economic point of view, the disappearance of interest in engaging in agricultural activities or starting a business in rural areas. At the same time, however, there has been a change in consumption habits/patterns and consumer behavior in the sense of registering a strong demand for “natural, organic products” in all areas. In this context, agritourism can be a means of diversifying rural economies in rural areas, a possibility to capitalize on unique resources. Consequently we state that it can be a winner, in terms of sustainability. It is true that this growth could not be completely a sustainable one, and the focus should be on authenticity of traditional products. These represent the identity of popular localities. Strong partnerships are intended to ensure mixing/blending of cultural activities, cultural heritage, gastronomy, agriculture, or simply the provision of a “short chain” aimed at supporting rural communities. What is certain is that in rural areas, where the emphasis was on capitalizing local resources, authentic resources through agritourism activities, the development was sustainable [22,23]. So the benefits of the development of agritourism activity concerning the quality of life standards may be, in many different ways, sustainable ones. Particularly the rural areas where this form of capitalization of local resources will be used can become the areas where the elements of local sustainable development will be assembled. The interest and the possibility to improve the infrastructure will arise, and they will contribute to bringing in the foreground the spiritual life of rural localities. This purpose may be realized through the strategic objectives concerning the human factor, technical endowments and heritage conservation [3,24].
- The social part also enjoys the evolution and development of agritourism by stopping migration and ensuring a motivation for it to remain in rural areas.
- Agritourism also acts on the management system of the rural locality. As this form of tourism develops, the local authorities are somehow obliged to work on the arrangement, support and maintenance of the community, starting from the access

possibilities to providing various services, from these beneficial aspects the local population benefits as well.

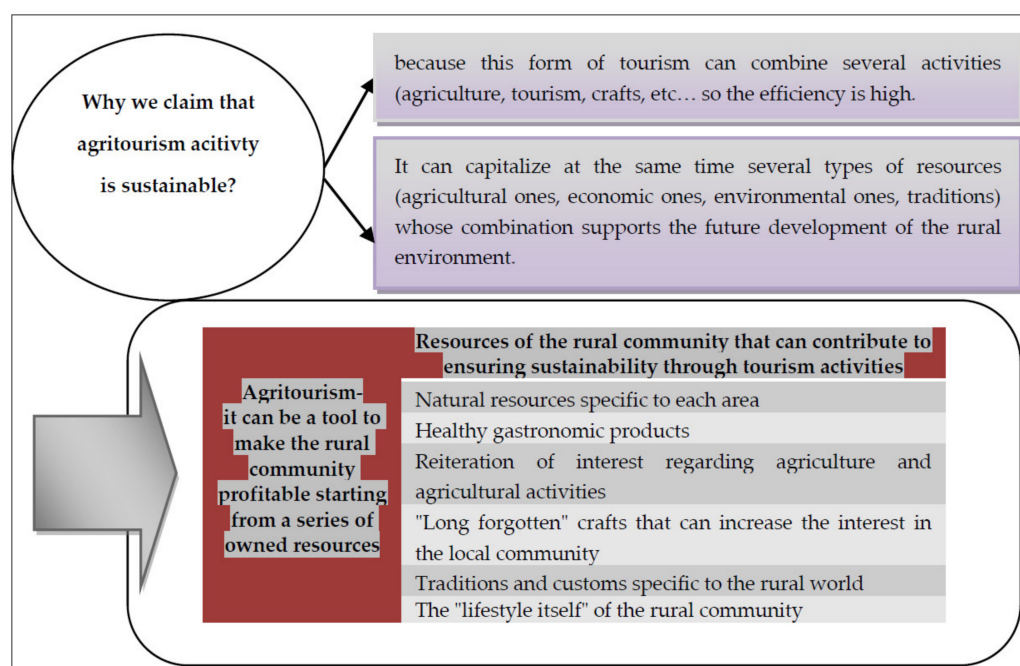


Figure 1. Agritourism—tool to increase the sustainable development of the community starting from the resources owned.

1.1. Literature Review

Agritourism is present in many studies from the recent years, but despite this importance, the issue of defining agritourism is not necessarily an easy task, this field of activity supports different meanings, as it is illustrated by the opinions of specialists (see Table 1). We can also refer to agritourism activities in the situation when the entrepreneur/farmer capitalizes through tourist activities only the products obtained in his own household/farm, the finality being a dual income together with the ability to sell the obtained products by own forces, without calling upon intermediaries. And in the situation when the farmer offers only the possibility to spend free time on the farm, we are also talking about agritourism, because the final goal is also to obtain complementary income, to those obtained from agricultural activity.

Obviously, the most developed and complex possibility, and the most desirable at the same time, for both categories involved in tourist activity, is the one in which the entrepreneur/farmer manages to "bring together" all the elements in a single product, which is offered to the tourist.

The definitions from Table 1 are perhaps some of the most comprehensive, but we believe that some but we believe that it is necessary to bring some new information. In other words, we refer to agritourism even when, for the final consumer, is offered only accommodation in the agritourism household/farm, as the agritourism entrepreneur relies on capitalizing through tourist activities the surplus of rooms, therefore the goal being to obtain a complementary income.

If only simple accommodation is offered through tourist activities, in the surplus spaces of the household/agritourism farm, we can refer to an unorganized form of agritourism, a form that does not require a prior strategy, and at the same time the owner's intention to obtain complementary financial resources in a short period of time. When, in addition to the "accommodation" component, the other two elements "food and leisure" are present, we can refer to an organized form of agritourism, a form in which a certain orientation of the entire production system is determined due to the requirements and desires

of tourists, which will ultimately lead to a better use of agricultural production through tourism activities, together with a sustainable future development of the agricultural farm. Emphasizing somehow, the ideas from above we can claim that the transposition of the products obtained by the household/agritourism farm to the requirements of tourists can be done especially through the food, and the possible purchases done by tourists. If the food element is used, then there is the possibility of incorporating farm/household products in traditional menus or offering the possibility for tourists to prepare their own food, providing them with the necessary ingredients.

Table 1. Definition of agritourism—review of representative studies.

Author	Definition	Study
Tew, C.; Barbieri, C.	The agritourism represents “any activity in which a visitor to the farm or other agricultural setting contemplates the farm landscape or participates in an agricultural process for recreation or leisure purposes”.	The perceived benefits of agritourism: The provider’s perspective. <i>Tour. Manag.</i> 2012 , <i>33</i> , 215–224
Ciolac, R.; Adamov, T.; Iancu, T.; Popescu, G.; Lile, R.; Rujescu, C.; Marin, D.	Agritourism) is as a form of rural tourism a hospitality activity, performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their families, that first of all, must remain connected to farming activities (which involves production activities, activities of processing agricultural products in the household and their marketing), and complementary to developing tourism activities, that completes the income from agricultural activity	Agritourism-A Sustainable Development Factor for Improving the ‘Health’ of Rural Settlements. Case Study Apuseni Mountains Area. <i>Sustainability</i> 2019 , <i>11</i> , 1467.
Canavari, M.; Hu_aker, C.; Mari, R.; Regazzi, D.; Spadoni, R.	In these structures, the farmer and their family members organize educational, recreational and leisure activities for visitors (e.g., hosts children, youth, school trips, as well as other groups and private individuals) as part of their normal work.	Educational farms in the Emilia-Romagna region: Their role in food habitat education. In <i>Food, Agri-Culture and Tourism</i> ; Sidali, K., Spiller, A., Shulze, B., Eds.; Springer: Berlin, Germany, 2011.
Arroyo, C.G.; Barbieri, C.; Rich, S.R.	“Agricultural setting”, “entertainment”, “farm”, and “education” should be included in a good definition of agritourism.	Defining agritourism: A comparative study of stakeholders’ perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina. <i>Tour. Manag.</i> 2013 , <i>37</i> , 39–47.
Sonnino, R.	“Activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities”.	For a ‘Piece of Bread’? Interpreting sustainable development through agritourism in Southern Tuscany. <i>Sociologia Ruralis</i> 2004 , <i>44</i> , 285–300.
Dax, T.; Zhang, D.; Chen, Y.	Existence of a working farm, realizing supplemental income through agritourism activities, services provided for enjoyment or education of visitors.	Agritourism Initiatives in the Context of Continuous Out-Migration: Comparative Perspectives for the Alps and Chinese Mountain Regions. <i>Sustainability</i> 2019 , <i>11</i> , 4418.
Adamov, T.; Ciolac, R.; Iancu, T.; Brad, I.; Peț, E.; Popescu, G.; Șmuleac, L.	Agritourism implies the existence of two main activities: the agricultural one practiced by the tourists’ hosts (which involves production activities, processing of agricultural products in the household and their marketing) and the tourist one, which implies the three elements of any tourist product with some features.	Sustainability of Agritourism Activity. Initiatives and Challenges in Romanian Mountain Rural Regions. <i>Sustainability</i> 2020 , <i>12</i> , 2502.

Source: Processing of data from [11,19,25–29].

In general, the agritourism activity can be developed in two main directions:

- *at the level of individual households*, in this case the agritourism product is made and managed by the entrepreneur/farmer together with the family members, and it assumes: offering accommodation in surplus spaces of the household/farm, made available at the tourist's request; offering food and beverages for consumption, mainly of their own origin; organization of recreational and cultural activities, in the farms, relying on diversity, depending on the possibilities that are materialized in: farm activities with emphasis on involvement in agricultural activities, emphasis on learning crafts, and outdoor recreational activities.
- *at the level of a small group of localities where a tourist tradition is already implemented*. In the conditions of modern life, agritourism can be a sustainable business, which at the same time can be a manner of diversification for farmers [30], but also a manner of diversification and support of the rural economy [31], and at the same time a possibility to spend free time with maximum benefits from the category of: landscapes and fresh air, original and healthy gastronomic products, entrepreneurial and life education. In fact, agritourism is a complex innovative model of business, a business that stimulates the development of global competitiveness. Farmers, through their ingenuity, sell farm products on new market segments (the tourism ones) to increase income [32], in other words they develop a family but traditional business, although with many questions to be answered (see Figure 2), but overall it remains the activity that can link agriculture and tourism in a sustainable way [33–35].

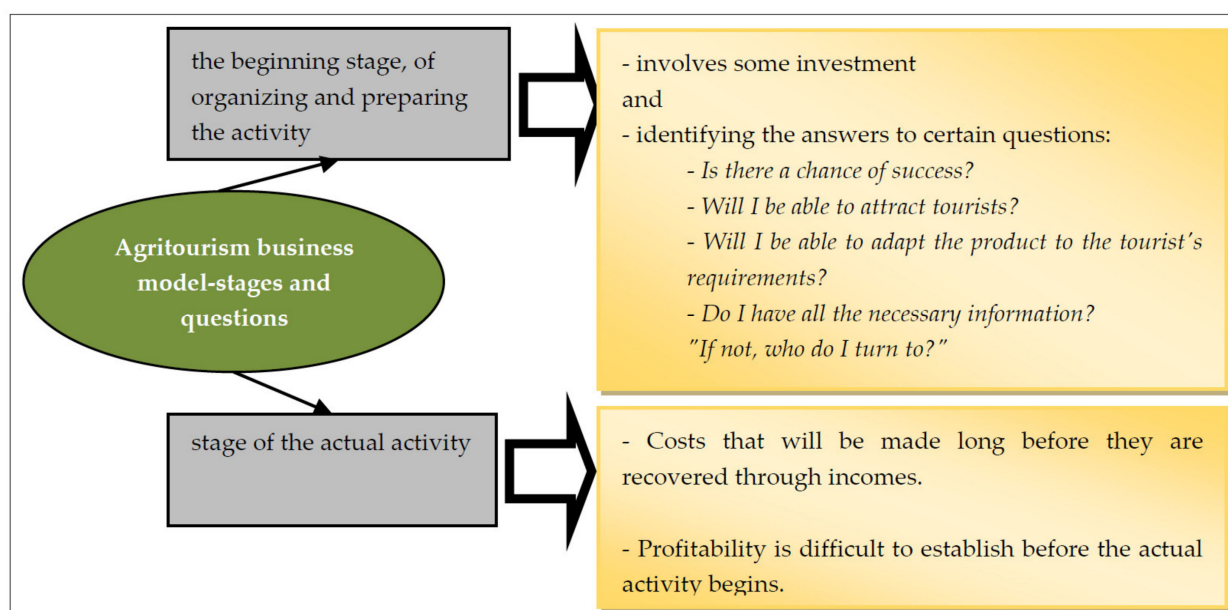


Figure 2. Agritourism business model—stages and questions.

Nowadays, the rural environment is facing a cruel reality: it has new, original, authentic resources, but still it faces with numerous problems, or even a severe poverty in some cases. And if that were not enough, another paradigm emerges: once this rural environment, rich in unique resources, is developed, the authentic loses its originality. Consequently the solution would be a special emphasis on a sustainable development of this rural environment, namely the focus should move on those activities that ensure the preservation of the authenticity, the viability of the rural world and at the same time its stability. One of these sustainable activities can be agritourism, which represents a healthy alternative for many of the rural problems, but some clarifications are required, as to be sure that this growth would be a sustainable one:

- The idea of the activity must start from its existence and placement as an activity in the rural environment, which suggests a closely related evolution of agritourism to the “existence” of the rural community. The functionality of the agritourism product derives from the characteristics and from the resources of the rural world, which must be incorporated in the tourist product (local natural resources, traditions, crafts, etc.). Regarding the future evolution, a certain tradition must be preserved in order to ensure sustainability. Also the cultural-historical resources, local crafts and the specific way of life should be the elements to rely on, when creating the tourist offer.
- Agritourism must come in “completing agriculture”, through agritourism both the products of agricultural activity and the particularities and agricultural facilities of the farm are capitalized.

In the cases where agritourism has reached a high level of development, a major contribution has been the association, or partnership, both between farmers and between them and other various associations/organizations. Therefore, from this association, the first visible result is the possibility of sustaining the attractiveness of this form of tourism, and afterwards the facility in carrying out activities with which the farmer/agritourism entrepreneur is not necessarily accustomed: identifying the niche market/consumers, sustained promotion, identifying sales techniques, etc. Following the above principles, agritourism can be considered a “sustainable activity” with multiple beneficial implications for the rural environment [36,37] (see Figure 3), consequently it contributes to supporting the development of the rural community, at local or regional level, starting from its own resources, used in such a manner that it is possible to create an original, authentic agritourism product that illustrates the specificity, the brand of the places [38,39].

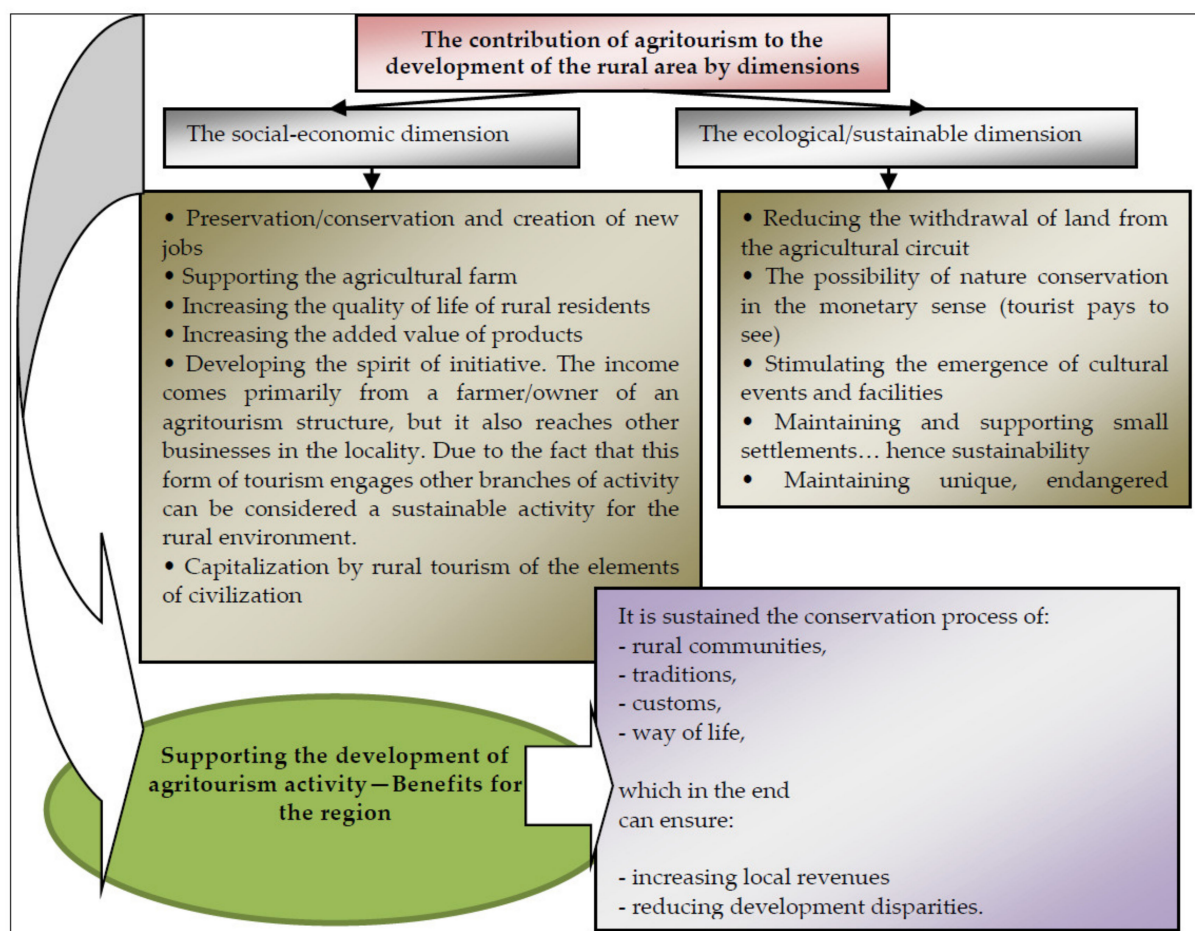


Figure 3. Analysis of agritourism activity contribution to the development of the rural area by dimensions.

In fact, it could be the missing link or the answer to the sustainable assembly of agricultural, gastronomic, tourist, cultural resources, and the agritourism product could be considered an innovative product, encompassing numerous fields/resources. About the household/agritourism farm it can be said that it differs from the classic agricultural farm, because it simultaneously carries out two fields of activity (agricultural and tourist) and it represents an innovation [40], a “business model”, [41] at a small, family level, in most cases managed by members of the same family, in a sustainable way, and passed down from generation to generation [42], worthy of being followed by other farmers as well [43]. It is true that in rural areas businesses are born harder than in cities and die faster. Also, the low opportunities reinforce the idea that managerial training occupies a minor place in achieving success. The lack of entrepreneurship education is visible from the fact that there are very few people in the country who write projects, access funds or develop large-scale businesses. It is clear, on the other hand, that this type of enterprise/business is neither easy to create nor to run. The sustainability of this kind of business comes from some rational foundations [44,45]: It is clear, on the other hand, that this type of enterprise/business is neither easy to create nor to run. The sustainability of this kind of business comes from some rational foundations [43]:

- from economic point of view, using local resources and products, in order to generate additional income for farmers/entrepreneurs;
- from social point of view, providing new jobs, but at the same time solving a number of other problems/differences between urban and rural areas;
- from an ecological point of view, it is perhaps the form of tourism that focuses most on protection, rural resources, either natural or anthropogenic.

1.2. The Aim of the Paper

The purpose of this scientific paper is the attempt to identify those aspects, key factors that make the agritourism activity “a possible business reality of the moment”, for Romanian rural area’s sustainability. In other words, the purpose is to establish the connection between agritourism, as a family business of a modest size, and the possible chance it could represent for the rural community. This aspect is implemented by bringing at front the link between agritourism family businesses and the success factor supporting the management of this activity/product. The study undertaken aims to achieve the proposed objective by pointing out aspects such as:

- Definition and sustainability of the agritourism activity, but also the reasons why the agritourism activity can represent an innovative business, a possibility to capitalize the resources of the rural community, but at the same time a business model, which stimulates the development of rural competitiveness through several benefits brought to the farmer/entrepreneur, meaning a healthy alternative to many of the rural problems;
- Selection and brief description of some rural areas, representative for the agritourism activity from Romania, of the evolutionary stages and why not issuing some recommendations related to the possible advantages of the Romanian agritourism product;
- Identification of the family businesses and using multi-criteria analysis of agritourism business in the two selected areas, to highlight the manner in which this activity is organized and which are the success factor supporting the management of this activity/product that contributed to the allocation of private/local resources through the agritourism activity;
- Proposing appropriate directions for a rural tourism business, as key factors in supporting the management of this activity/product.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to demonstrate that the agritourism activity can be considered “a possible business reality of the moment”, we studied two areas from the Romanian rural environment:

- The Bran-Moieciu area, which has the longest history in terms of the presence of agritourism in Romania, therefore it is considered “the oldest” as experience; and
- The Apuseni Mountains area, with a more recent debut in agritourism activity, but it has a great potential.

In achieving the goal of the paper, we have used, as a method of research, the multi-criteria analysis [46–50] because: the main aspects of agritourism phenomenon are not the same, in both areas. Moreover, we have used different data sources in order to make a descriptive situation of the two areas, allowing the observation of the agritourism dynamics, and also to take into account both the differences and similarities between the two areas chosen for comparison (see Figure 4). In order to achieve the proposed goal, we first proceeded to identify the theoretical sources, on which the study is based, using various specialized bibliographic sources and databases, then we compared the areas in terms of potential to support agritourism, and then to identify important aspects to be presented and the completion of the questionnaire to be applied in the two areas under study. The obtained results were analyzed and presented in the chapter with the results, and the conclusions of the study were drawn based on these results.

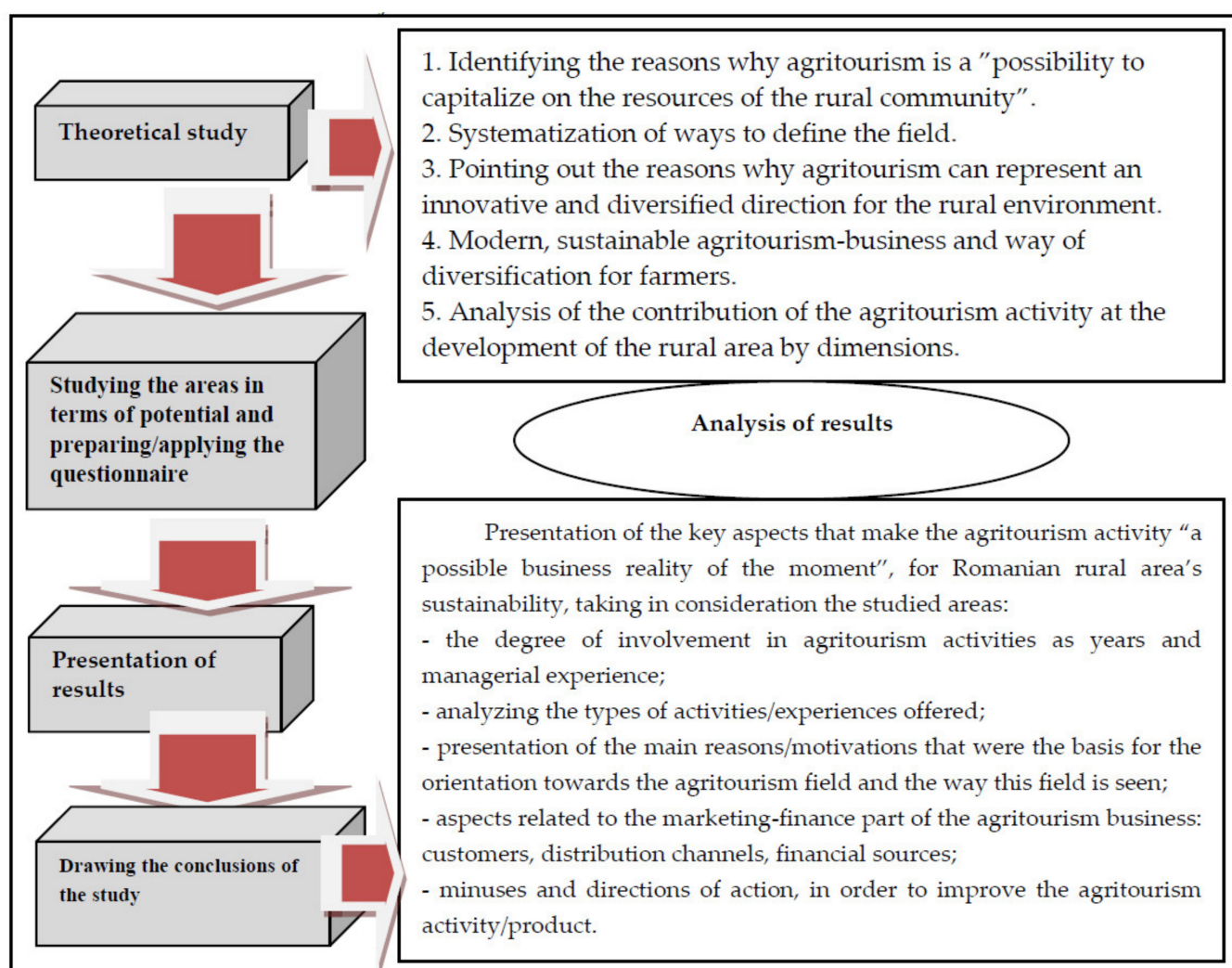


Figure 4. Steps of the research-short description.

The two areas were selected on the principle: the oldest/the newest. The questionnaire included a set of ten questions, being sent for completion to the selected structures by e-mail. The completion period was of two calendar months, returning with a reminder in the middle of the period. It was planned to apply the questionnaire to all the agritourism structures, titled in the list displayed by the National Institute of Statistics for the two areas, but:

- in the case of the Bran-Moieciu area, out of the 238 agritourism structures, full answers were received only from 185 structures, representing a percentage of 77.73%. There were another 21 questionnaires received but with partial answers. Were included in the study only the questionnaires, which were answered completely.
- in the case of the Apuseni Mountains area, out of 259 existing agritourism structures, full answers were received only from 175 structures, representing a percentage of 67.56%. To this number, another 29 questionnaires are added, not fully completed, which did not participate in the study.

The two regions, chosen for the study, in this paper, have some similarities, but also some differences. However, the applied questionnaire had the same set of questions for both areas, these being oriented towards identifying some aspects, in order to prove the reasons why the agritourism activity may be a business reality of the moment for Romanian rural area's sustainability:

- highlighting the characteristics of the respondents from the two analyzed areas, and the degree of involvement in agritourism activities concerning years and managerial experience;
- analyzing the types of activities/experiences offered by the agritourism units in the two areas subject to the study;
- presentation of the main reasons/motivations that were the basis for the orientation towards the agritourism field and the manner in which this field is seen, in the vision of the owners of agritourism structures from the two areas subject to the study;
- identification of aspects related to the marketing-finance part of the agritourism business: customers, distribution channels, financial sources, in other words possible success factors, supporting the management of this activity/product, from the point of view of the owners, the goal being the chance that the agritourism activity could represent for the rural community;
- identifying some disadvantages and at the same time presenting some directions of action in order to improve the activity/agritourism product in the two areas that would have the role of placing agritourism as a business reality of the moment for Romanian rural area's sustainability;

The limitations of the present study, or the critical points, referred to: comparison of the two areas according to the same parameters as potential, obtaining a significant number of completed questionnaires, quite large geographical areas selected for the study. Nevertheless these shortcomings were eliminated during study. The main information collected was analyzed using computer software, and statistical calculations were performed in EXCELL, then findings were presented using tables and figures for interpretation.

3. Results

3.1. Describing Romania and the Specific Potential Areas as a Place of Research

The stated objective of the research involves the identification and description of the research area, and of the evolutionary peculiarities (see Figure 5). If we put Romania on the map of European agritourism [51,52], then it can be claimed that its beginning as an activity is a spontaneous one, in an unorganized form [53].

The period of time in which the Romanian agritourism activity, was officially organized and supported, did not last long, therefore it did not support much the development of rural areas, but even so it was a beginning that enabled the owners of rural structures to get acquainted in some extent with the principles of this activity.

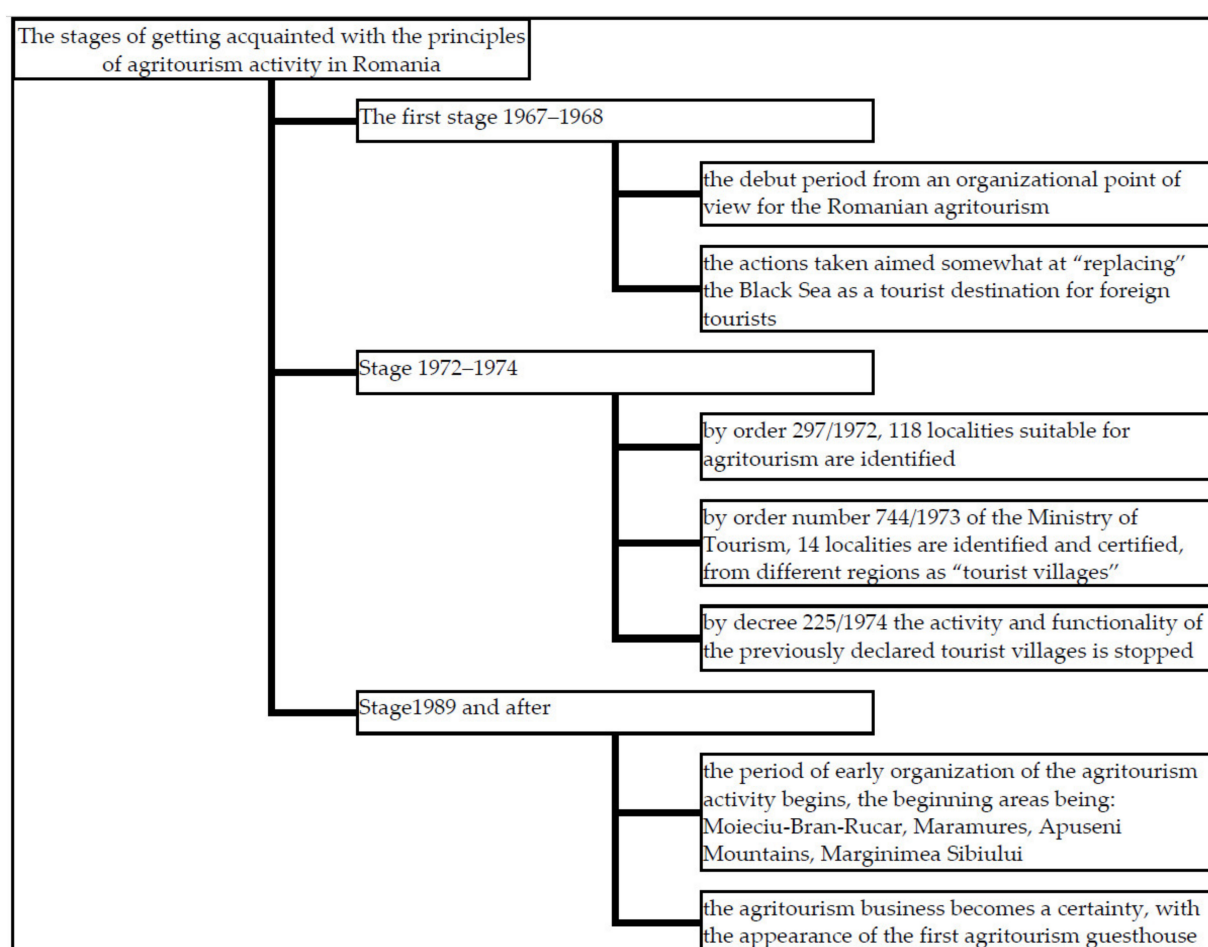


Figure 5. The stages of getting acquainted with the principles of agritourism activity in Romania. Source: Processing data after different source [29,53].

Studying the tourism product of the rural environment [54,55], together with the main factors of the purchasing decision, in the conditions of the tourist market and collaborating with the strengths and weaknesses, it is found that minimizing weaknesses and maximizing strengths will create a profitable market niche. Agritourism is spatially placed in rural areas and it is carried out by highlighting the diverse potential of this environment, focusing mainly on space, the hospitality of the local population and the consumption of agricultural products. It starts from mountains, rivers, beach, fishing opportunities, caves, ski slopes, historical monuments, wine bars, monasteries, castles and the countryside, traditions, crafts, specific lifestyle, and then this spectrum of possibilities is narrowed. The aim is to identify the characteristics that make Romania different. What has Romania to offer and does not compete directly with other tourist destinations? If we try a brief diagnosis of the motivation in choosing the holiday destination, it is found that a tourist chooses: France for the beach or to visit Paris; Germany for hiking; Austria for skiing; Greece for history; Spain for islands.

Romania offers a great variety of tourism, but the tourist must “see” those unique tourist products that cannot be seen and obtained in other countries. Romanian agritourism must discover a niche on the market to capitalize on. The niche market can be realized from the multitude of alternatives, from one of the following options:

- The product itself—the Romanian village with its specific way of life, traditional Romanian festivals, Romanian holidays (Easter, Christmas), different fairs (Gaiia Mountain-girls’ fair, ceramics fairs), Romanian food-folk gastronomy, wines and brandies, painted monasteries, the myth of Dracula, peasant cities, the Danube Delta.

- Price as concept for value (existence of a fair price/quality ratio) must be well understood: it is necessary to offer an exceptional value;
- Another opportunity includes the traditional lifestyle and the existence of old villages where the tourist can experience a “time travel”.

3.2. Identifying and Presenting the Success Factors of Agritourism Activities in the Selected Areas

Entrepreneurial initiatives in the field of agritourism have been undertaken in several locations throughout the country, usually where tourist resources are abundant: most entrepreneurial initiatives start from the phrase “the tourist finds the farm, and not the other way around”, usually due to the advertisement done by other tourists.

At the level of Romania, there are five representative agritourism areas: Maramures area, Bran-Moieciu area, Bucovina area, Marginimea Sibiului, and the younger and newly entered in this category the area of the Apuseni Mountains (see Figure 6).

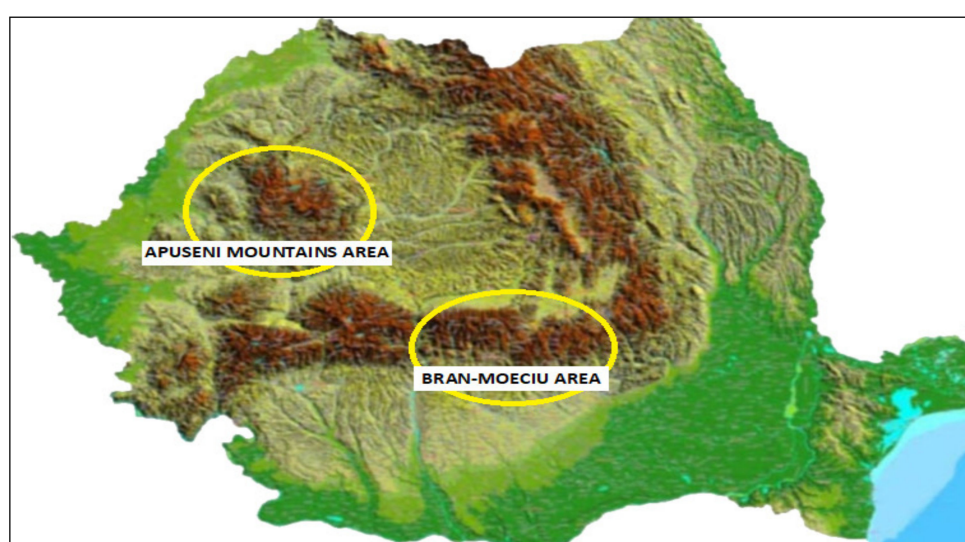


Figure 6. Identification of the representative agritourism areas on the map of Romania. Source: processing after <https://sites.google.com/site/srinoultestament/harta-romaniei>, accessed on 11 January 2021 [56].

From the five areas, we chose to compare two: the one in which the agritourism activity has started, the Bran-Moieciu area, and the newest one, the area of the Apuseni Mountains.

The shaping of the tourist patrimony of the *Bran-Moieciu agritourism area* supposes the capitalization of the components of the natural and anthropic tourist fund and it is realized through the existing technical-material base. The traditional Romanian hospitality, a feature specific to the Romanian peasant, becomes an offer of rural tourism, in the conditions of its channeling towards the direction of the action that supposes preparing the peasant household to reach the stage in which to be the bearer of the commercial offer. The essential elements (see Figure 7) that have become the basic components of agritourism in this area can be:

- Preservation of ancient crafts, brought to light for tourists. In Bran, Sirnea, Moieciu, Cheia, Fundata, the old ethnographic and folkloric traditions are still preserved. It is the first tourist village in Romania, with multiple folklore manifestations specific to the area: decorating Easter eggs; wood carving; masks and dolls; icons on glass; tanner’s activities and furrier’s activities.
- Rural fairs could be one of the possible products to be exploited through rural tourism, with advantages for both producers and tourists.
- The old shepherds’ settlements offer a unique view towards the Piatra Craiului ridge and towards the Bucegi Massif. Some of the oldest traditions are still preserved, one

of them referring to the “agricultural agreement” regarding the land, the locals being much attached to the land they own.

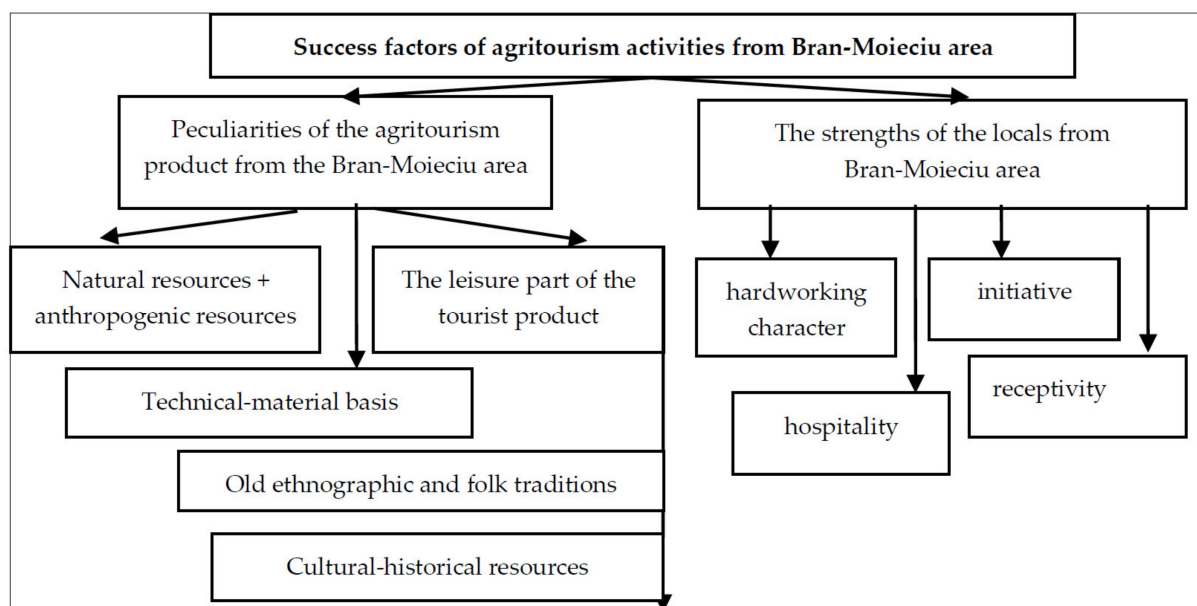


Figure 7. Presentation of the success factors of agritourism activities in the Bran-Moieciu area.

Over time, the rural specificity of the *Apuseni Mountains* region is defined by the scattered hamlets, consisting of houses located at great distance from each other, as well as by the inhabitants’ way of life, directly related to the pastoral cycle, and it is determined and influenced by the habits and the traditions practiced in this area (see Figure 8).

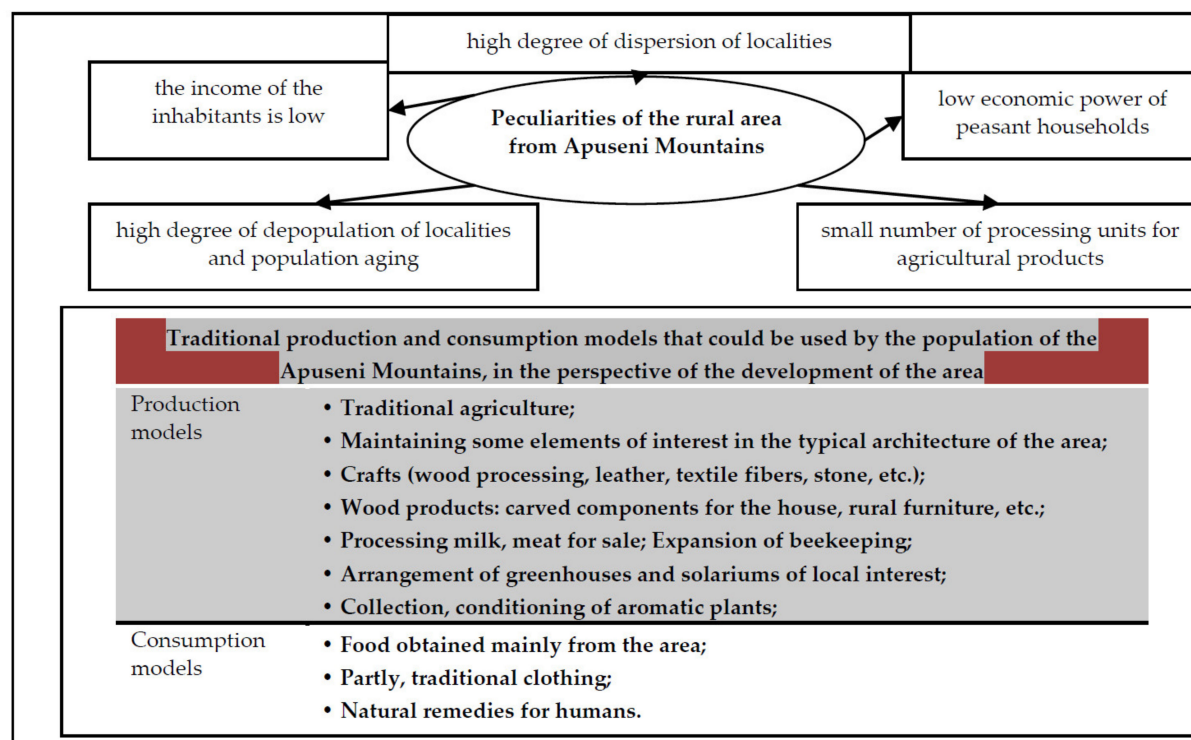


Figure 8. Peculiarities of the agritourism activity in the area of the Apuseni Mountains. Source: Processing of data from [57].

The urbanization degree of the region is around 30%, so quite low, which is an advantage for our activity. Similar, to all regions of the country, here as well, the traditions have been largely distorted, and today only the framework of some customs is preserved. This crisis is mainly a consequence of the changing reality of the Romanian village. Given that the development of rural areas is slow and sometimes retrograde, the changing of traditions is an inevitable process. Even if this area is more “newly entered” in the agritourism circuit, it has been the subject of numerous researches regarding the possibility of developing agritourism [19,57–60] and is well seen internationally, being recognized as “one of the 20 most beautiful tourist destinations” [61], or one of the “best kept secrets in Eastern Europe” according to CNN. Unlike the other Carpathian units, in the Apuseni Mountains the permanent human settlements are close to the highest peaks (Ocoale-Scarisoara at 1200 m is among the highest settlements in the country). The representative traditions of the Apuseni Mountains area are supported by specific communities. The Moths are the most representative community of the Apuseni area. The mountains offer them few opportunities to live, nevertheless they know how to manage their resources, making the most of what nature gives them sparingly. The carpenter’s trade is inherited from father to son, starting from the choice of wood for the staves and to the making of barrels, pots, not to mention the making of traditional “alpenhorns” and handicrafts. With the same mastery the Moths use wood in building their entire household. The houses, built exclusively of wood, have a specific architecture. The traditional occupations were terrace farming, which is no longer practiced and animal husbandry. The houses are built in a unitary architectural style, the village is considered an architectural reservation, therefore in 1999, Rimetea received the EUROPA NOSTRA AWARD for the restoration of houses in the center of the village. Currently, the traditional painted furniture processing is being revitalized. The village museum completes the local tourist offer [62]. Possible success aspects for agritourism from the two areas, are highlighted in Figure 9 below.

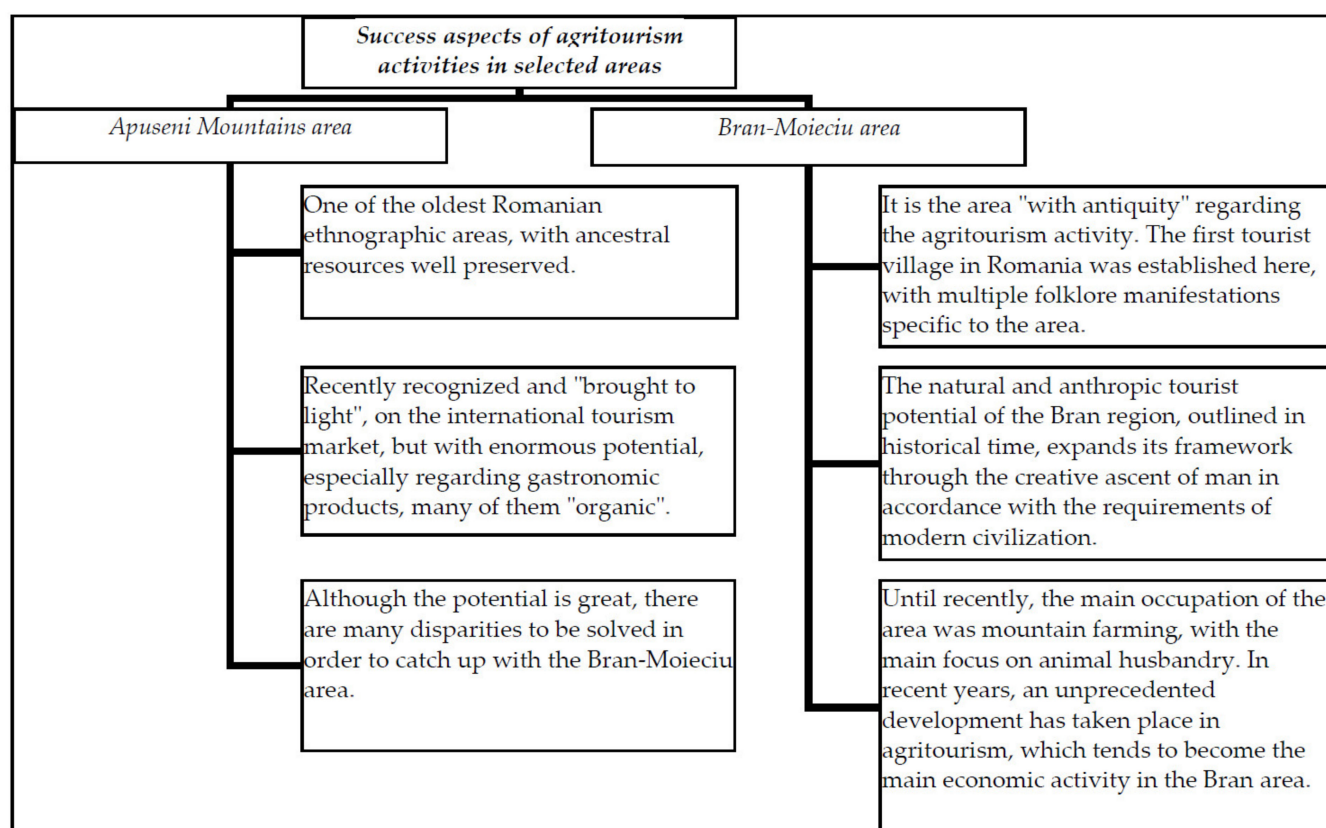


Figure 9. Identification and presentation of the success factors of agritourism activities in the two areas-Comparative analysis.

3.3. Identification of the Family Businesses and the Success Factor Supporting the Management of this Activity/Product

Starting from the statement above, the one that Romania offers a great variety of tourism forms, but the tourist must “see” those unique tourist products [63], we go further and we tell that, the two areas subject to comparison are areas that can be “brought in the eyes of the tourist through a lot of elements”. There are, in the two areas subject to comparison, family businesses oriented through the agritourism field, the situation being presented in Table 2, the evolution of these units being constant in both areas, during the entire highlighted period.

Table 2. The stage of evolution of the agritourism activity in the two regions subject to comparison.

Agritourism in the Bran-Moieciu Area—The Stage of Evolution of the Agritourism Activity											
Specification	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Agritourism guesthouses (number)	75	64	93	100	102	112	108	120	121	112	114
	72	81	116	126	128	135	130	146	137	128	124
Index of net use of agritourism accommodation capacity	12.4	13.8	13.2	12.6	13.2	15.1	15.5	16.4	18	20	12.4
Agritourism in the Apuseni Mountains Area—The stage of Evolution of the Agritourism Activity											
Specification	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Agritourism guesthouses (number)	154	121	150	142	139	149	161	249	254	258	259
Index of net use of agritourism accommodation capacity	10.2	11.4	13.5	12.6	12.9	14.3	15.4	15.6	15.7	15.9	14.2

Source: Processing after the data obtained from the INS, consulted in 14 March 2021 [64].

It can be observed that, at the level of the Bran-Moieciu region, the area with the longest age in terms of activity, but reduced as territory; the total number of the existing agritourism structures is 238 units. At the level of the Apuseni Mountains, with less agritourism experience, but extended on the territory of six counties, the total number of agritourism units is slightly higher, 259 units (24 units in Bihor County, 87 units located in Alba county, 87 in Cluj County, 18 units being arranged in Arad County, 27 in Hunedoara County, and 16 in Salaj County). However in relation to their surface, quantitatively speaking the first area subject to comparison has a greater importance.

- *Highlighting the characteristics of the respondents from the two analyzed areas, and the degree of involvement in agritourism activities considering years and managerial experience is the first aspect proposed to be analyzed, and the information obtained are highlighted in Table 3 and Figure 10.*

Table 3. Highlighting the characteristics of the respondents and the degree of involvement in agrotourism activities.

Area Studied	Measure Unit	Characteristics of Respondents (a)		Degree of Involvement in Agritourism Activities (b)				
		Men	Women	No. of Generations Involved in the Development of Agritourism			Total/Integral Coordination of the Managerial Activity of the Unit	
				1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd Generation	Full Coordination	Partial Coordination
Bran-Moieciu area	No.	102	83	149	31	5	178	7
	%	55.13	44.86	80.54	16.75	2.70	96.21	3.78
Apuseni Mountains area	No.	89	86	153	19	3	172	3
	%	50.85	49.14	87.43	10.85	1.71	98.28	1.71

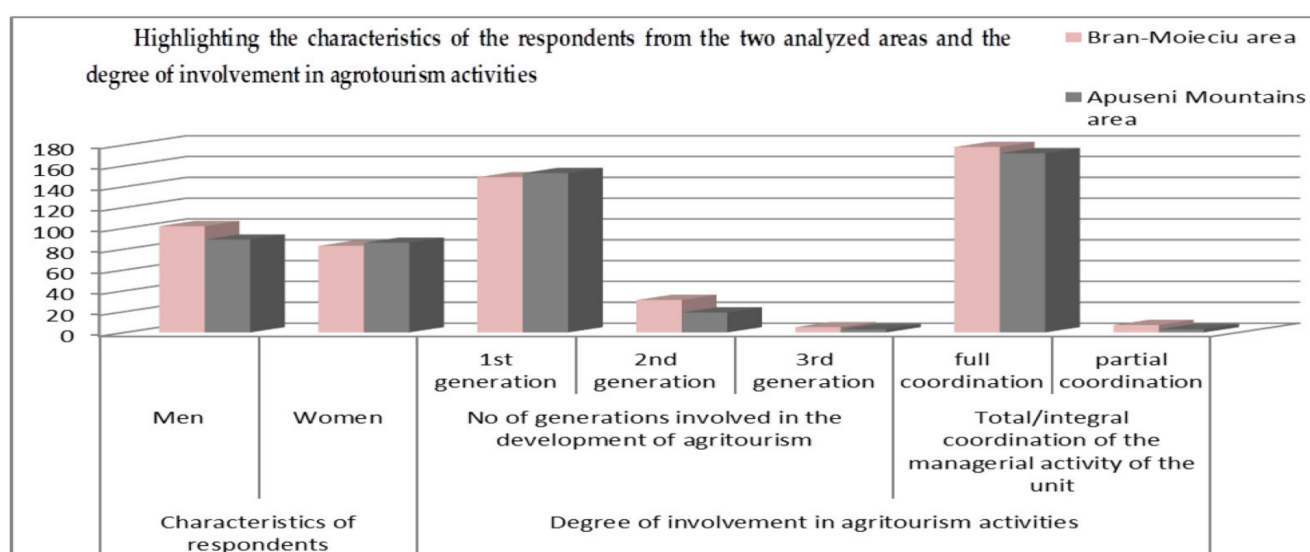


Figure 10. Highlighting the characteristics of the respondents from the two analyzed areas and the degree of involvement in agrotourism activities.

Out of the total number of the existing agrotourism structures, meaning 497 structures, from both areas of the study, 360 structure were surveyed, respectively 72.43%. The situation is as follows: from the Bran-Moieciu area, 185 agrotourism structures were included in the current study, respectively 77.73% of the total number of existing structures; from the Apuseni Mountains area a number of 175 agrotourism structures, respectively 67.56% were part of our study. Regarding the characteristics of the respondents (a) it is mentioned that the agrotourism structures under study are owned by private persons, and the findings reveal the predominance of males among the owners of such businesses, within the two areas analyzed.

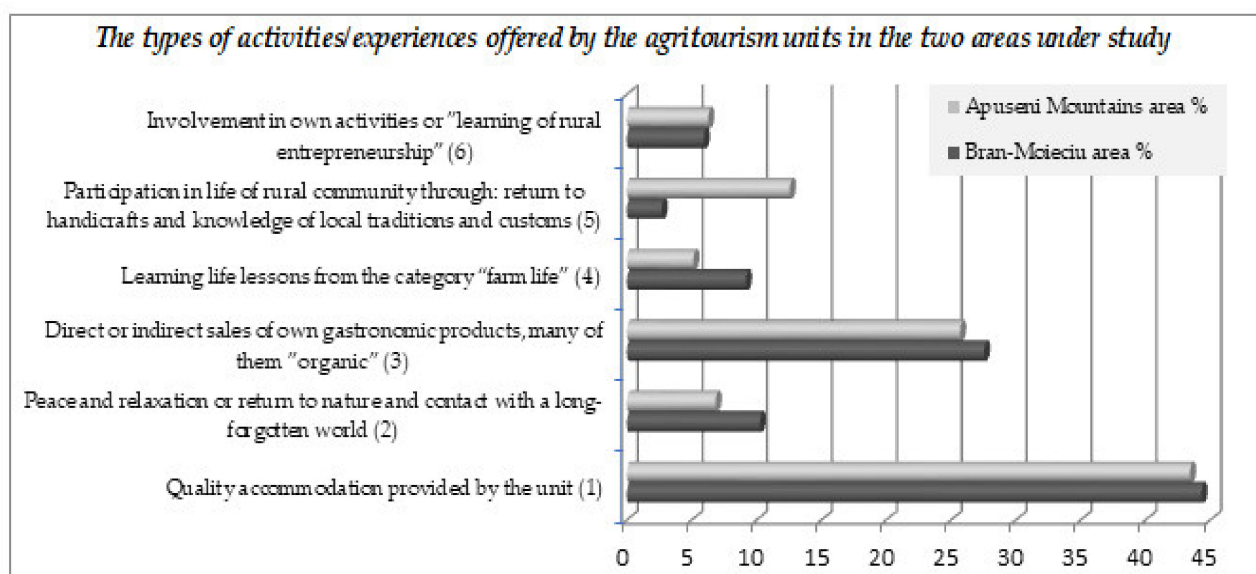
We can observe that in both areas the agrotourism is quite “young”, namely it predominates the first generation involved in the activity, only by paying attention to the information that reveals the degree of involvement in the development of agrotourism (b), and considering the number of years. For the Bran-Moieciu area, 80.54% of the owners of agrotourism businesses are in the “first generation” category, 16.75% of the owners have been able to pass on the business to their children, and only a percentage of 2.70% of the total surveyed agrotourism businesses have reached “the seniority level” necessary for transmission to the third generation. For the Apuseni Mountains area the situation is somehow similar, so 87.43% of the total agrotourism business included in our study are found in the first generation, only 10.85 survived enough to be passed on to the second generation, and 1.71% reached the third generation.

The low percentage of the owners of agrotourism structures who declared that, in order to coordinate the activity, they have benefited from aid, in fact they referred to the accounting and sales/capitalization part of the agrotourism products. In fact, a previous study [29] showed that the owners of agrotourism structures, from the two areas do not have specialized training in the field, so in other terms they need help for certain stages of the activity, especially in terms of the creation and capitalization of the agrotourism product.

- The analysis of the types of activities/experiences offered by the agrotourism units from the two areas subject to the study, was a second sub-objective study in order to emphasize the motivation for which agrotourism activity may be a business reality of the moment for Romanian rural sustainability from the two areas studied, the relevant information being illustrated in Table 4 and Figure 11.

Table 4. The types of activities/experiences offered by the agritourism units.

Typology of Activities	Bran-Moieciu Area		Apuseni Mountains Area	
	No.	%	No.	%
Quality accommodation provided by the unit (1)	82	44.32	76	43.43
Peace and relaxation or return to nature and contact with a long-forgotten world (2)	19	10.27	12	6.86
Direct or indirect sales of own gastronomic products, many of them "organic" (3)	51	27.56	45	25.71
Learning life lessons from the category "farm life" (4)	17	9.19	9	5.14
Participation in life of rural community through: return to handicrafts and knowledge of local traditions and customs (5)	5	2.70	22	12.57
Involvement in own activities or "learning of rural entrepreneurship" (6)	11	5.94	11	6.28

**Figure 11.** The types of activities/experiences offered by the agritourism units.

The purpose of this sub-objective was to highlight the activities, that each agritourism business relied on to attract tourists, the intention being to highlight the motivation for which agritourism can ensure the sustainability of the farm, as well as the rural environment. The question was conceived with several answers, each agritourism unit has identified and chose only those activities that it offered to the tourist.

Analyzing the information obtained, it can be observed that in the case of both areas the analyzed agritourism business relies on the "quality accommodation provided by the unit" (1), as an essential element, in majority proportion, respectively 43.43% for the Apuseni Mountains and 44.32% for the area Bran-Moieciu. The accommodation highlights the unique elements of both locations: the typical wooden house-Blockbak and the dovetail in the Bran-Moieciu area and the moths' house from Apuseni Mountains area, whose traditional architecture is a certain tourist resource because of the material used in the construction of buildings, wood, through the original architectural solutions and through the harmonious combination of architectural elements. The owners are focused on capitalizing on the accommodation element, otherwise unique in both locations, they do not insist much on the other elements of the agritourism product, which require more knowledge and experience (we refer here especially at the leisure and the linking part of this activity to the local community). Starting from the current pandemic situation, we can state that the owners of agritourism businesses were well oriented towards offering the accommodation as the main element, because the tourist's attention will be directed towards such areas, which are isolated from the dense tourist traffic.

On the second place there is "the direct or indirect sales of own gastronomic products, many of them organic" (3), in both areas, in representative proportions: 25.71% in Apuseni Mountains area and 27.56% in Bran-Moieciu area. In both areas under analysis, agriculture

is an old occupation of the inhabitants [65], and it represented the main source of ensuring food security over time. Even if the agricultural farms, from the analyzed areas have small dimensions and a rudimentary endowment that ensures a low efficiency, they offer the possibility of obtaining products with high biological value, namely organic products, due to the traditional techniques used. Consequently, the owners of agritourism businesses have understood that the approach of agricultural activity must be aimed either towards the possibility of obtaining food products, or towards offering the possibility of jobs for residents in rural areas (especially in isolated ones). The products obtained by the farms in this situation can and must be capitalized through agritourism, and in this manner they ensure the sustainability of the two areas.

Placing the activities offered by the agritourism business on the third place, are illustrated the specificity and the geographical characteristics of each area. In the case of the Bran-Moieciu area, the owners of agritourism businesses place the offer of “peace and relaxation or return to nature and contact with a long-forgotten world” (2) on the third place, the area being “on the way of visiting” by tourists who go to the Black Sea. These tourists stay here only a few days, the area is chosen for peace and clean air. In fact, this geographical positioning has contributed to the development of rural tourism activity up to a large extent. In the case of the Apuseni Mountains, the third place is occupied by an activity the owners offer, namely the possibility of “participation in the life of rural community through: return to handicrafts and knowledge of local traditions and customs” (5), hence the rural, isolated character of this area is observed. Due to this isolation, the traditions and crafts are very well preserved, representing a true “value” that would be a shame not to be capitalized.

In Bran-Moieciu area, the following activities used by the owners of agritourism structures are on the last three places: “learning life lessons from the category “farm life” (4), 9.19%, “involvement in own activities or learning of rural entrepreneurship” (6), 5.94%, “participation in life of rural community through: return to handicrafts and knowledge of local traditions and customs” (5), 2.70%. The placement of these activities on the last places emphasizes the “beginner stage” in the agritourism activity of entrepreneurs from this area. Despite the fact that it is the area with the longest age in Romania in the field of agritourism, in the leisure part of the agritourism product, or sustainable integration of all the resources of the area in the tourist product is still to be worked on, in order to ensure a sustainable capitalization.

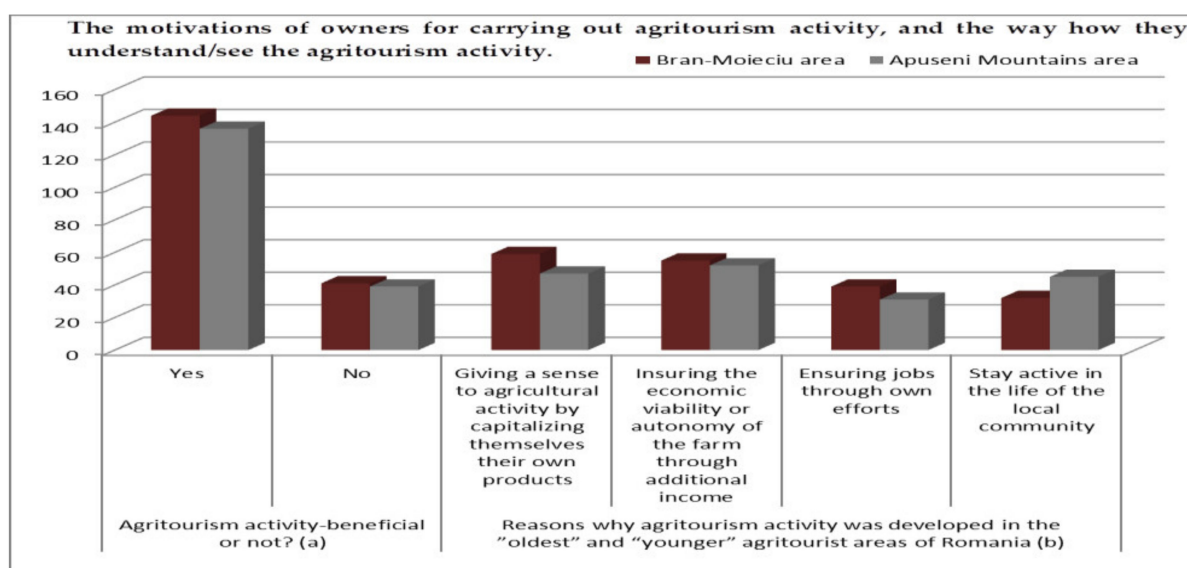
In Apuseni Mountains area, the following activities used by the owners of agritourism structures are on the last places: “peace and relaxation or return to nature and contact with a long-forgotten world”, 6.86%, “involvement in own activities or learning of rural entrepreneurship”, 6.28%, “learning life lessons from the category “farm life”, 5.14%. In the case of this area, even if the agritourism activity is at the beginning in comparison with Bran-Moieciu area, the emphasis on the sustainable capitalization of own and local resources, through this activity are stronger. Here the owners of agritourism businesses pay attention to the capitalization of the surplus of rooms through accommodation, of the organic products obtained from their own local production, directly or indirectly, and very important, on the introduction in the agritourism product of crafts, traditions, specific way of local life, in other words it promotes that authentic agritourism.

- *Presentation of the main reasons/motivations that were the basis for the orientation towards the agritourism field and the way this field is seen in the vision of the owners of agritourism structures; the relevant information is illustrated in Table 5 and Figure 12.*

In our attempt to compare the “oldest and youngest” areas from Romania, from the point of view of the period of time the agritourism activity was developed, we considered that it is very important to understand how the owners understand the activity, as an opportunity or on the contrary, and what were and are the reasons for its development over time. In order to find out these aspects, which are obviously connected, two questions were used, with predefined answers, and with the mentioning that the motivations need to be positioned in descending order.

Table 5. The motivations of owners for developing agritourism activity, and understanding degree.

Area Studied	Measure Unit	Agritourism Activity-Beneficial or Not? (a)		Reasons Why Agritourism Activity Was Developed in the “Oldest” and “Younger” Agritourist Areas of Romania (b)			
		Yes	No	<i>Giving a Sense to Agricultural Activity by Capitalizing Themselves Their Own Products</i>	<i>Insuring the Economic Viability or Autonomy of the Farm through Additional Income</i>	<i>Ensuing Jobs through Own Efforts</i>	<i>Stay Active in the Life of the Local Community</i>
Bran-Moieciu area	No.	144	41	59	55	39	32
	%	77.83	22.16	31.89	29.73	21.08	17.30
Apuseni Mountains area	No.	136	39	47	52	31	45
	%	77.71	22.28	26.86	29.71	17.71	25.71

**Figure 12.** The motivations of owners for developing agritourism activity, and understanding degree.

Following the centralization of the information, it can be observed that, in the case of both areas, in approximately similar proportions, higher than 77%, the entrepreneurs from the agritourism field consider that the agritourism activity was beneficial for them, respectively it represented an opportunity.

Regarding the reasons why agritourism activity was developed in the “oldest” and “younger” agritourist areas of Romania (b), in the case of the Bran-Moieciu area, entrepreneurs put on the first places capitalizing their own products to support agricultural activity 31.89%, afterwards insuring the economic viability/autonomy or autonomy of the farm through additional income 29.73%, and on the third place ensuring jobs through own efforts 21.08%.

For the second area, the one of the Apuseni Mountains, the owners of agritourism businesses considered in proportion of 29.71% that ensuring the economic viability/autonomy or autonomy of the farm through additional income to be the main motivating element. Afterwards in close connection with this motivating element there is the capitalization of their own products to support agricultural activity in proportion of 26.86%. From placing the motivation, related to remaining active in the life of the local community, on the third place, with a proportion of 25.71% that “isolation” of the inhabitants from the area derives from various reasons and therefore the sense of belonging to the community is somehow higher than in the case of the other area. And from this idea it can be argued that, even if the agritourism business is family-sized, namely modest, it may be a business reality of the moment, at least for the Apuseni Mountains area.

- *Identifying some aspects related to the marketing-finance part of the agritourism business: customers, distribution channels, financial sources, in other words possible success factors supporting the management of this activity/product, from the point of view of the owners, the identified aspects being shown in Table 6 and Figure 13a,b.*

Table 6. Identifying some aspects related to the marketing-finance part of the agritourism business as possible success factor supporting the management of this activity/product.

Area Studied	Measure Unit	Distribution Channels Used (a)		Consumer Segments (b)		Financial Sources (c)	
		Direct Distribution	Distribution through Intermediaries	Young People (Up to 40 Years Old)	Over 40 Years	Own Sources/Own Investment	Loans/Other Financing
Bran-Moieciu area	No. %	171 92.43	14 7.56	60.25%	39.75%	158 85.40	27 14.59
Apuseni Mountains area	No. %	167 95.42	8 4.57	68.67%	31.33%	164 93.71	11 6.28

Table 6 and Figure 13a,b actually contain three questions, focused on the financing and sales, respectively, to give us a perspective of the size of agritourism businesses in the areas subject to comparison, the aim is to highlight the future chance that agritourism activity could be for the farm/rural community.

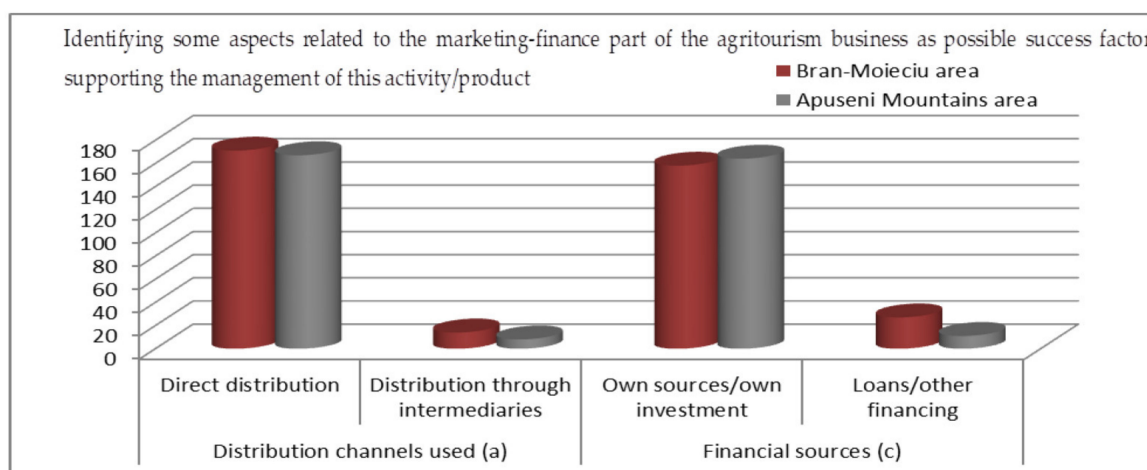
The first aspect to be highlighted refers to the distribution channels (a), used by the agritourism structures for the sale of their own products. Answering this question, the owners of agritourism businesses provided us with information related to the sale of both agritourism products and other products obtained in their own household/farm (see Figure 13a). In the case of both areas subject to our study, the distribution of agritourism products is made in proportion of over 90% directly, favoring the tourist-host relationship. The percentage of those who use intermediaries to sell their products is quite small, 7.56% in the case of Bran-Moieciu and 4.57% in the case of the Apuseni Mountains area. Due to the small agricultural or economic size of the farms in both analyzed areas, the productions obtained are not very large, and their marketing can be done almost exclusively through agritourism activities. But despite this, capitalization of the advantage of the products obtained here is not achieved.

There are many organic, authentic, non-certified products, but their certification would only bring benefits for producers. Afterwards the capitalization of agricultural products (the surplus of those necessary for the agrotourism activity), and of the crafts where it is the case, can be done under other variants:

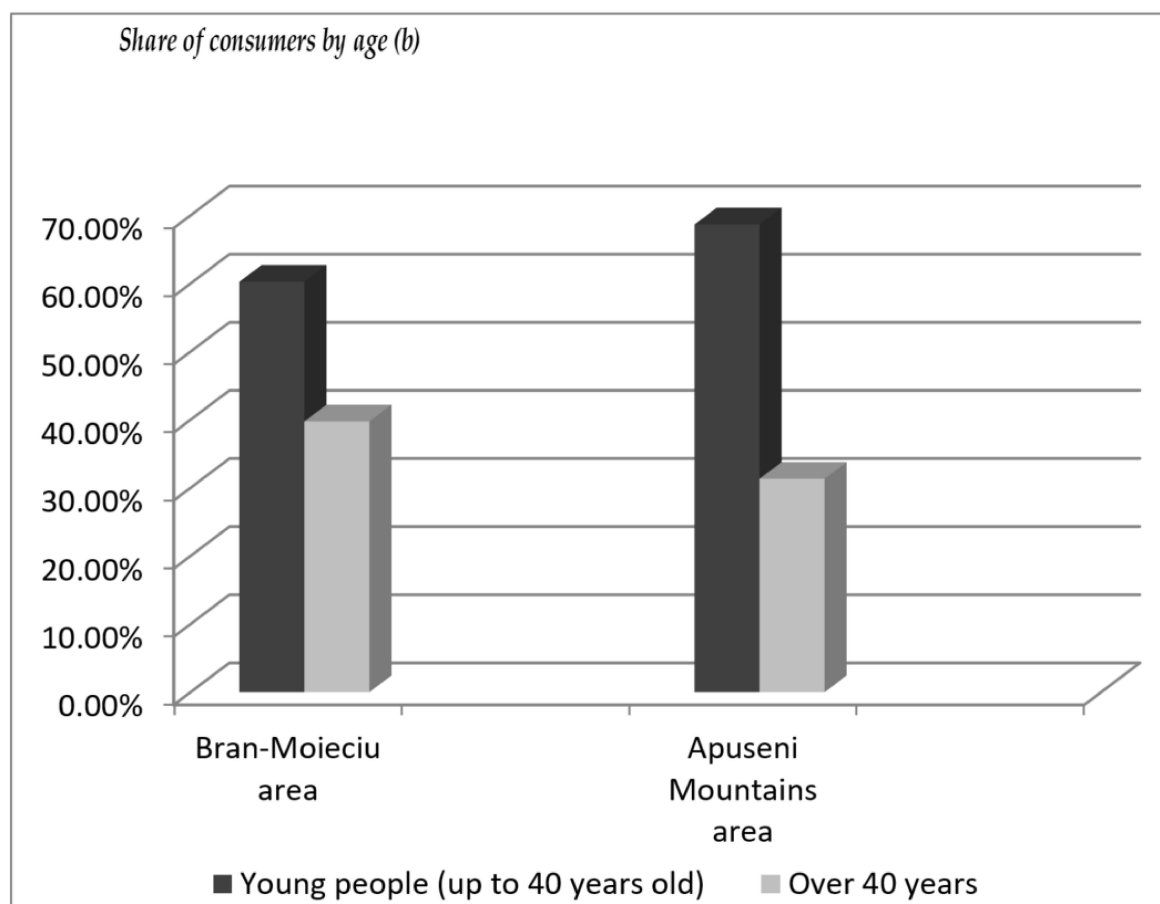
- involving tourist activities as well, through certain programs such as “Pastry-route from chicken egg to finished product”, “Pastry-route from wheat and flour to finished product”, “The towel-between tradition and modernity”;
- not involving the tourist activities, but capitalizing on the current context (that of the desire to look for healthy products, and why not the pandemic one) by capitalizing the option “natural product directly from the farm in the plate at home”.

Through the following aspect, consumer segments (b), we intended to highlight the sustainability in time of this field, by illustrating the predominant category of consumers of the studied agritourism units, namely we wanted to see how long this activity will last, considering the current preferences of tourists (see Figure 13b). Therefore, the owners had to provide information on the division of tourists into two categories: young tourists (up to 40 years) and over 40 years. In the case of the Bran-Moieciu area, the category “young people (up to 40 years old)” represents 60.25%, and the category “over 40 years old” represents 39.75%. In the case of the second studied area, that of the Apuseni Mountains, the situation is somehow similar, only the percentages are different, namely the category “young (up to 40 years)” holds 68.67% of all tourists of the surveyed agritourism units, and the category “over 40 years ” 31.33%. It can be observed that, even if the Apuseni

Mountains area is at the beginning in agritourism field, the number of consumers up to 40 years is higher here. At the same time, the Bran-Moieciu area has the advantage of its position, that of being located on the way to a popular tourist destination (Black Sea), and tourists combine the sea with the mountain. A possible explanation could be the natural resources, the gastronomic ones from the Apuseni Mountains area, considered by tourists more attractive, and if we overlap the current context, maybe the “isolation” of the area would be an advantage.



(a)



(b)

Figure 13. Identifying some aspects related to the marketing-finance part of the agritourism business as possible success factor supporting the management of this activity/product.

We claim that the degree of development of the tourism activity can be discussed also by taking into account the sources of financing (c) used by tourism entrepreneurs to set up the agritourism business. Similarities have been found in this aspect as well. The owners of agritourism structures from Bran-Moieciu area claim, in proportion of 85.40%, that they used own sources/own investment in order to transform the farm into an agritourism structure, and only 14.59% resorted to loans and other financing sources. In the case of the Apuseni Mountains area, the percentage of those who used their own sources/own investment to finance agritourism investments is even higher, 93.71%, and the percentage of those who used loans and other financing sources is low, of only 6.28%. The primary conclusion derived from this information is that it strengthens what was discovered in the case of the other aspects studied, namely that, even if the Apuseni Mountains area is “younger” in terms of agritourism, the current premises converge to a sustainable activity. Because in this area, the percentage of self-financing of the transformation of the farm/household into an agritourism establishment and subsequently the activity itself is high, the conclusion that derives is the following: there is a circuit of reinvestment of incomes obtained first from agricultural activities in agritourism activities, which determines us to believe that reinvestment will continue in the future as well, therefore the sustainability of the farm/area/community is ensured.

- *Identifying some disadvantages and at the same time presenting some directions of action in order to improve the activity/agritourism product in the two areas that could have the role of placing agritourism as a business reality of the moment for Romanian rural area's sustainability.*

The connection between the agritourism activity, as a business of modest dimensions, and the possible chance that it could represent for the rural community was studied starting from the current situation in the two Romanian areas compared. Once these aspects have been identified, which are otherwise necessary to support the sustainability of this field for the agritourism unit itself, and afterwards for the community, we consider necessary the identification of future directions to improve or support this field of activity. Because those who carry out the agritourism activity directly are the most able to emphasize its strengths, and to come up with proposals, in our questionnaire the answers to the questions that follow this part are free, only the division is done by us. Consequently, the owners of agritourism businesses are the ones who must first identify the disadvantages they have and they are also the ones who propose the directions of action in order to improve the agritourism activity/product in the two areas. The conclusions are to be found in Table 7 and Figure 14.

Table 7. Disadvantages that the owners of agritourism structures and directions for action.

Area Studied	Measure Unit	Disadvantages That the Owners of Agritourism Structures Consider That They Have (a)				Directions for Action in Order to Improve the Agritourism Activity/Product (b)
		<i>Difficulty in Creating the True Agritourism Product</i>	<i>Infrastructure (Access/Leisure)</i>	<i>Lack of Association/Partnership</i>	<i>Disadvantages Related to Promotion for Visibility</i>	
Bran-Moieciu area	No.	62	49	33	41	Accent on capitalization of local gastronomic products through agritourism Using the “specific rural life of the community” to attract tourist
	%	33.51	26.48	17.84	22.16	
Apuseni Mountains area	No.	15	67	41	52	Involving the local community in developing agritourist activity Efforts to increase the visibility of agritourism product from the two areas at national level
	%	8.57	38.28	23.43	29.71	

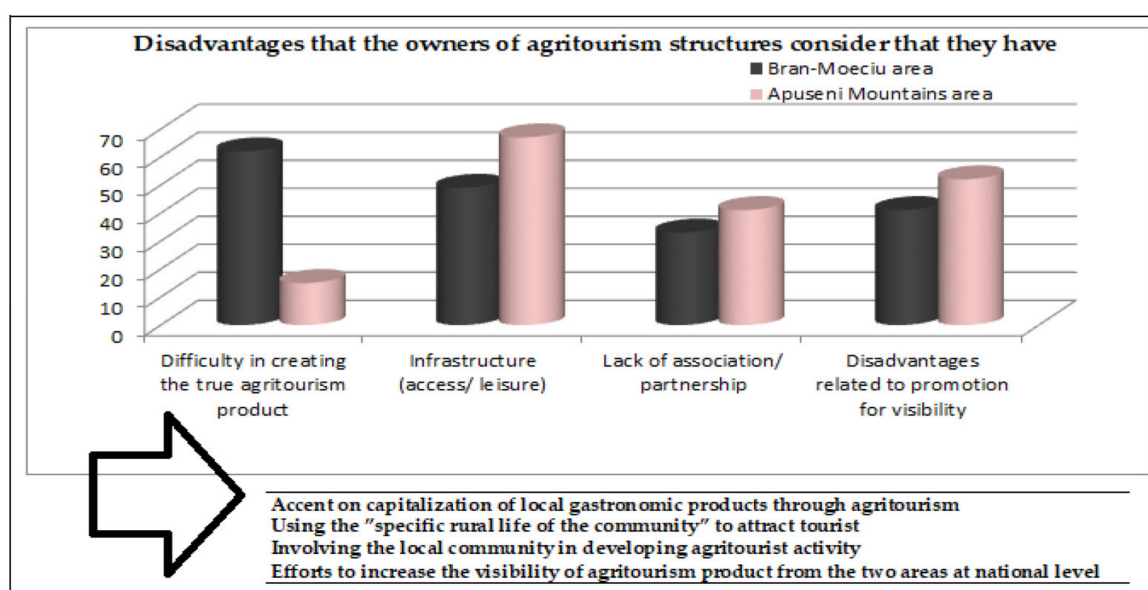


Figure 14. Disadvantages that the owners of agritourism structures and directions for action.

Regarding the first aspect we pursued, namely disadvantages that the owners of agritourism structures consider they have (a), we included in the table the most mentioned aspects, noticing slight differences between the two areas studied. For Bran-Moeciu area, the entrepreneurs from the agritourism field, put on the first place the difficulty in creating the true agritourism product, with a weight of 33.51%, then infrastructure (access/leisure) in a weight of 26.48%, referring especially to the infrastructure necessary for leisure activities, on the third place disadvantages related to promotion for visibility, with a power of 22.16%, and on the fourth place the lack of association/partnership, with a percentage of 17.84%. The situation is a bit different in the case of the Apuseni Mountains area, namely the agritourism entrepreneurs put in the first place the lack of infrastructure (access/leisure), referring especially to the access infrastructure, with a rather high percentage of 38.28%, then disadvantages related to promotion for visibility, with a weight of 29.71%, lack of association/partnership, with a weight of 23.43% and the difficulty in creating the true agritourism product with a percentage of 8.57%.

The second aspect complements the first by proposing directions for action in order to improve the agritourism activity/product (b), directions generally valid for both areas. In the presented table there were exposed the directions mentioned most of the times, regardless of the area. These directions refer to: accent on capitalization of local gastronomic products through agritourism; using the "specific rural life of the community" to attract tourist; involving the local community in developing agritourist activity; efforts to increase the visibility of agritourism product from the two areas at national level.

3.4. Proposing Appropriate Directions for a Rural Tourism Business as Key Factors in Supporting the Management of This Activity/Product Is an Objective That Should Logically Follow the Study Undertaken and the Information Recorded

Following the aspects identified and presented during Section 3.3, we consider that the proper organization of agritourism business, in order to be "a possible business reality of the moment" must take into account some essential aspects, in order to be efficient and ensure rural sustainability (see Table 8): [66,67].

- a proper estimation of investments. In order to achieve positive results, any rural tourism entrepreneur must provide tourists with a minimum of comfort required by the rules in effect. Even the simple activity of camping in the peasant's household, demands certain services from him that can be fulfilled with certain efforts: water, bathroom, security at night, etc. In order to ensure this minimum comfort, the

farmer/entrepreneur must make some investments so as to highlight the original, rustic elements of the household and to be able to ensure the comfort with which the tourist is accustomed. Knowing as accurately as possible these initial costs related to transforming the household into a future agritourism business is of great importance for calculating the profitability of the business. If it is taken into consideration the restoration of authentic elements then the costs are not to be taken into account. So a proper estimation of investments is very important for supporting the management of this activity, and transforming it into a smart business and at the same time into a smart opportunity for farmers and farm. There are added other costs to these initial ones, such as: promotion costs, actual operating costs, which are also very important.

- a proper knowledge of the opportunities that the rural area offers for the diversification of services. It should be kept in mind that the diversification of the services offered contributes greatly to increasing the quality of rural tourism activities. Regardless of the category of tourists, both for young and old, both for the healthy and the sick, the optimal conditions for relaxation and rest must be provided and organized in advance. Rural areas have many resources, with a novelty, originality character, which can be used to attract tourists, and which tourists appreciate favorably if they are properly integrated and presented in the tourism product. The tourist entrepreneur must know very well the particularities of the area, the resources and products, or in other words what can be easily capitalized from the area, at the lowest possible costs, and he/she has to add these resources to the tourist product. All these local resources can be used as a way to spend the free time. If the strengths of the rural area are well known, then the tourist product can be made by involving several producers or service providers from the rural area, thus ensuring sustainability.
- the analysis of the qualitative parameters of the services that can be offered. It is important to establish the optimal level of intertwining the refinement of modern civilization, specific to our age, with traditionalism and rural style of life. It is ideal for modern elements to be implemented and masked as discreetly as possible, proving their usefulness more strongly than their presence. The tourist appreciates the original, the authenticity of the rural areas, starting from the specific elements of the accommodation and ending with the food and leisure elements, but the minimum of comfort must be ensured, without the appearance of kitsch.
- the improvement and diversification of the rural tourist product and of the conditions for its realization. In this direction, the existence of restructuring strategies is required for agritourism product, together with scanning consumer desires and some association wherever it is possible, or a partnership and outsourcing of some of the elements of the tourism product [68]. At present, the duration of the tourist leisure stay in the rural area is reduced, being reduced to an average of 3 days, meaning a weekend, therefore it is obviously necessary to improve the tourist product, especially if we talk about leisure opportunities.
- in order to know the agritourism product, it is necessary to diversify the promotion actions, especially with external addressability, and the distribution of the agritourism product to imply involvement from the rural household and obviously to update the existing logistics. The existence of automated record systems is therefore necessary and also the possibility of distributing the agritourism product through the Internet in the future.
- the agritourism business incubators are, at this moment, an instrument of assistance in support of the peasant household, especially during the stages of establishment and incipient activity. After the improvement of the agritourism service, the creation of a database regarding the clients and the improvement of the managerial activity will leave the incubator [69–71]. The main purpose of the incubator is to offer free consultancy, to facilitate the contact with the banking bodies, to stimulate the talent for the creation of the agritourism services offered by the peasant household.

- also an important aspect worth to be mentioned is related to rural destination management organizations (DMOs). Changes and challenges related to the rural environment are numerous and difficult, lately, and the possibility of ensuring prosperity through the agritourism business, involves focusing on rural destination management (DMOs), in order to ensure “a special marketing of business”, agritourism business in our case, in order to ensure local sustainable development through tourism and manage the main benefits [17,72–74]. In order to sustain the success of the rural tourism activity, the role of DMOs is related to the realization of a tourist product through the partnership of farmers, authorities and why not of tourists. DMOs presuppose in a concrete way the establishment of the objectives, the choices, the establishment of the vision to be followed, the identification of the resources to be used, in other words the establishment of a strategy to be followed [54,75].

Table 8. Directions for a rural tourism business as key factors in supporting the management of this activity.

Appropriate Directions-Future Proposals	Key Factors in Supporting the Management of This Activity	Consequences of This Measures
a proper estimation of investments	make some investments so as to highlight the original, rustic elements of the household must be able to know the initial costs, scanning the market, or other business	Stimulation of those who carry out agricultural activities to ensure also tourist activities if they are profitable Supporting the management of this activity, and transforming it into a smart business
a proper knowledge of the opportunities that the rural area offers	must know very well the resources of the rural area proper to be capitalize through tourist activity involving several producers or service providers from the rural area to obtain rural tourist product	Possibility to capitalize local resources, through an activity closest to sustainability Efficiency knowledge in knowing local, authentic resources will ensure an original tourist product Possibility of to ensure for tourist diversified services The possibility of partnerships with multiple benefits for those involved
analysis of the qualitative parameters of the services that can be offered	establish the optimal level of intertwining the refinement of modern civilization accent on traditionalism and rural way of life	Capitalization of original, traditional resources through new establishments such as guesthouses Protection local/authentic resources
improvement and diversification of the rural tourist product	scanning consumer desires and create partnerships to ensure “an unforgettable agritourism product for the consumer”	Improve the tourist product and increase the average tourist leisure stay in rural area Ensuring through the elements of tourist product the possibility of obtaining additional income/or other benefits by all the inhabitants of rural area
diversify the promotion actions	automated record systems as a necessity promotion with external addressability	Improvement of the distribution of the agritourism product
agritourism business incubators	the creation of a database regarding the clients improvement of the managerial activity	Sustaining the agritourism by encouraging the specific investments in other field than agriculture Supporting the development of agritourism projects through free consultancy Stimulate the talent for the creation of the agritourism services offered by the peasant household
rural destination management organizations (DMOs)	partnership of farmers, authorities and tourists establishment of a strategy to be followed	A special marketing of agritourism business Benefits for all categories involved

Source: own proposals of the authors based on the conclusion of the research.

4. Conclusions

The study undertaken is related to the fact that agritourism could be “a possible business reality of the moment”, for Romanian rural area’s sustainability, and in support of this statement we proceeded to identify those key factors, which claim that agritourism can be at the same time a modern sustainable business, but also a way of diversification for the farmers from the two regions chosen for study (on the oldest/newest principle), within this work, the Bran-Moieciu area and the Apuseni Mountains area:

- the degree of involvement in agritourism activities as years and managerial experience was the first aspect revealed in supporting the proposed aspects. The highlighted data reveal the “youth” of the agritourism business, generally managed by the first generation. The same conclusion can be reached if we discuss about the coordination of the activity, as in both areas the agritourism activity being coordinated by the family members, almost entirely.
- analyzing the types of activities/experiences offered, the motivation according to which the agritourism activity can ensure the sustainability is illustrated, both for the agricultural farm and the rural environment. Both areas under study are mostly mountainous areas, and the Bran-Moieciu area is located at the confluence of other tourist areas, and the length of stay is not high at present. The accommodation is the main element required by tourists, so both areas have identified the needs of the tourists and bent on their demand. Although they are somehow beginners in the field, many of the owners of agritourism businesses have identified quite well the opportunity and purpose of this activity, and they capitalize on the positional advantage that both areas have: the existence of many products and opportunities to obtain organic products. They have also identified aspects related to “participation in the life of rural community through: return to handicrafts and knowledge of local traditions and customs” which are capitalized by the studied areas, more timid it is true, but it represents a beginning, and we can say that there is “raw material” in abundance.
- presentation of the main reasons/motivations that were the basis for the orientation towards the agritourism field and the manner in which this field is perceived. In the case of both areas, entrepreneurs in the agritourism field consider that for them the agritourism activity was an opportunity, the reasons being: insuring the economic viability or autonomy of the farm through additional income, capitalizing their own products, ensuing jobs through own efforts, being present in the life of the local community.
- aspects related to the marketing-finance part of the agritourism business: customers, distribution channels, financial sources. The conclusion we reached in the case of distribution channels used by agritourism entrepreneurs highlights the effort of entrepreneurs to market their products through the short distribution channel, which, despite being more demanding, on the long run, brings benefits in terms of sustainability primarily for agritourism entrepreneurs, and secondly for other local producers and obviously for the community. In the case of both areas, it can be observed that the category of tourists up to 40 years of age predominates, most of which is represented by families, which is a gratifying thing. In other words it illustrates that this form of tourism also attracts the young age category, therefore, the sustainability of the activity over time is supported as a result of the proven interest. The area of the Apuseni Mountains is “younger” in terms of agritourism, but the percentage of self-financing of the transformation of the farm into an agritourism establishment and the activity that follows is higher, therefore there is reinvestment, and the sustainability of the farm/area/community is ensured.
- minuses and directions of action in order to improve the agritourism activity/product. The differences between the two areas emerge from the minus that is placed on the first, in the case of the Bran-Moieciu area, respectively on the last place, in the case of the Apuseni Mountains area. Compared to the Bran-Moieciu area, here the traditions,

the crafts, the original agritourism elements are in abundance, due to the “isolation” of the area from the modern civilization. The “isolation” of the Apuseni Mountains area also results from the fact that the lack of infrastructure (access/leisure) is a minus signaled by entrepreneurs. The fact that the association is also a minus, but at the same time, a future “must”, is noticeable in both areas, as well as the need to work on a more intense promotion. The directions of action in order to improve the agritourism activity/product, seen by the entrepreneurs from both areas suppose: accent on capitalization of local gastronomic products through agritourism; using the “specific rural life of the community” to attract tourist; involving the local community in developing agritourist activity; efforts to increase the visibility of agritourism product from the two areas at national level.

Concluding we state that agritourism may be “a possible business reality of the moment”, but more and more, the farmer should become an entrepreneur able to set up and run an agritourism business, and for this purpose he must be able to take decisions for his own business; to ensure its viability; to support its long-term profitability and development.

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