

CONTRIBUTION OF AGRITOURISM TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Radu-Adrian MORARU¹

e-mail: ramoraru@uaiasi.ro

Abstract

Agritourism encompasses a wide range of experiences and activities related to agriculture and rural life, offering real opportunities for rural development. The primary aim of this paper was to highlight the links that exist between agritourism and sustainability, based on a systematic review of the scientific literature. In this regard, all three dimensions of sustainability (economic, ecological and social) were considered. Numerous studies and researches have focused on the analysis of the effects generated by tourist activities on rural environment, their findings being essential for the management of tourist destinations and rural sustainability strategies. According to the specialized literature, the development of agritourism can have both negative and positive consequences. The contribution of agritourism to the sustainable development of rural communities may include several directions (job creation, additional source of income, environmental and cultural conservation, preservation of agricultural heritage, infrastructure improvement etc.). Achieving positive effects requires efficient planning, community involvement and responsible practices in agritourism management. Avoiding environmental degradation, overdevelopment and negative impact on local traditions and culture is essential for the rural sustainability.

Key words: agritourism, rural development, rural sustainability, impact of agritourism

Among the topics covered by the scientific literature and scholars, very frequent are those related to the effects of agritourism on the rural area and local communities, as well as regarding the potential of tourist activities to contribute to the sustainable development of the rural environment. Despite the different visions and conclusions of the researchers, they agree that agritourism could be the right means to create new opportunities to diversify the rural economy and to achieve the sustainability of rural areas (Barbieri C., 2013; Moraru R.A. *et al*, 2022), especially in the case of the poorest and unattractive for investments (Moraru R.A., 2019; Park D.B. *et al*, 2012) or of the isolated areas, where the cultural and environmental heritage exerts a strong attraction for visitors (Shen F. *et al*, 2009; Ciolac R. *et al*, 2019). The concept of “rural development” can be described as “an overall improvement in the economic and social well-being of rural residents and the institutional and physical environment in which they live” (Hodge I.D., 1986). To be sustainable, the development must be based on local resources, especially natural ones. These resources are under the control of farmers and the local population, these being the main actors who can influence the future of rural space through their

development options (Van der Ploeg J.D. *et al*, 2000).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The main objective of this paper is to highlight on what grounds agritourism can be considered as a tool for sustainable development. This article also aims to highlight the positive effects of farmers' involvement in tourist activities and to show if they are in accordance with the requirements imposed by the concept of sustainability. To achieve these objectives, the specialized literature review method was applied and the international experience in this field was analyzed. The approach started from the hypothesis that, by developing agritourism in the right way, it has the potential to promote the sustainability of villages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the last decades, the concepts and objectives of sustainability and sustainable development have been among the main concerns of researchers and the whole society (Harrington B.L.M., 2016). As a result of globalization, intensive urbanization and the continuous increase in the costs of agricultural inputs as well as the

¹ Iasi University of Life Sciences, Romania

pressures on the natural environment, the rural area faces numerous problems and challenges, undergoing important changes at an economic,

social and ecological level (McGehee N.G., 2007; Yang, L., 2012) (figure 1).

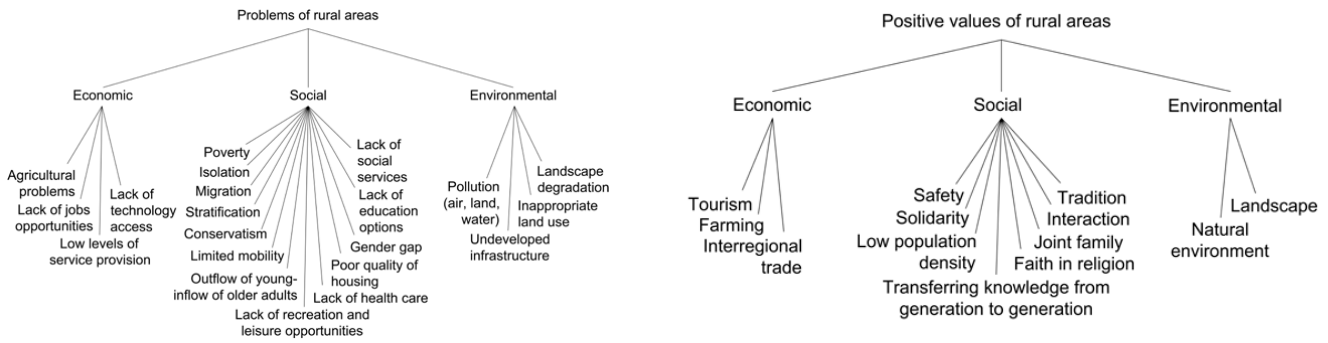


Figure 1 Problems and values of rural areas (Lekić O. et al, 2018)

For a sustainable future in rural development, three basic conditions must be fulfilled: improving the quality of life of the rural population; protecting and preserving natural and cultural resources in rural areas; ensuring sustainable agricultural production (Sonnino, R., 2004). Sustainable agriculture consists of ecological agricultural practices that allow obtaining plant and animal productions without affecting natural and human systems, avoiding the negative impact on habitats, water, soil and local resources from upstream and downstream of agricultural activities (Kothari H. and Perwej A., 2021).

Rural sustainability is central to global sustainability, as rural areas are very important to the whole society due to the multiple functions and services they provide (Harrington B.L.M., 2016). The preservation of the rural environment requires knowing and highlighting its values and the factors that influence them (figure 1), in order to find the most appropriate solutions to neutralize possible negative effects (Lekić O. et al, 2018). That is why multi-functional development of rural areas is necessary, which means, in addition to sustainable agricultural production, the development of other functions of agriculture (Sobczyk W., 2014) (table 1).

Table 1

Functions of traditional and sustainable agriculture

Traditional agriculture	Sustainable agriculture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food production • production of raw materials for the farming industry and food processing industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • production of safe food, • identity of rural areas, • generation of renewable materials for the production of bioplastics • production of energy from biomass (biogas, bio-alcohols, biodiesel) and renewable energy: solar, wind, water fall and geothermal

The scientific community shows a growing interest in the relationship between the diversification of farms through agritourism and the implementation of sustainable rural development (Kothari H. and Perwej A., 2021), all

three classic pillars of sustainable development, which are best known as the Triple Bottom Line - TBL (Sonnino, R., 2004), being covered: ecological, economic and socio-cultural (figure 2).

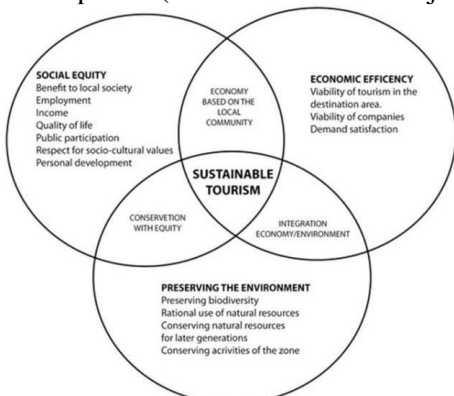


Figure 2 Sustainable Agritourism development model (Kothari H. and Perwej A., 2021)

Ensuring the sustainability of the rural area requires the achievement of a sustainable development of agritourism, which implies the minimization of negative effects on the environment, the reuse of resources and the recycling of materials, the increase of the quality of services and the number of visitors, the preservation of the local culture and activities (Tseng M.L. *et al*, 2019), as well as applying the Best Management Practices for an agritourism business: providing an authentic farm experience, an educational experience and excellent customer service; providing adequate public facilities; maintaining a accessible and safe environment; creating good community relations (Sachaleli N., 2022). The U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) takes into account six essential elements of agritourism sustainability: authenticity, relationships, fun, learning, values and

involvement (Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program, 2021).

Agritourism activities are very diverse, but regardless of their nature, they must obey the principles of sustainable tourism: the touristic activity should be managed by the local community, by its own means; to create new jobs for local people, thus improving their quality of life; international standards in tourism must be respected, with the establishment of acceptability limits for different areas and monitoring the impact of tourist activities; various educational and training programs should be implemented, in order to improve the management of the protection of cultural and natural resources (Jamieson W. and Noble A., 2000).

The evaluation of the three dimensions of agritourism can be done based on some indicators of sustainability, as summarized in *table 2*.

Table 2

Sustainability indicators for agritourism (Rodrigues Ferreira D.I. *et al*, 2023)

Dimension	Description
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm household income • Farm gross sales • Diversification effect on farm profits • Employment of family members (in numbers) • Number of farm employees • Number of full-time employees • Diversification effect on employees • Revitalization of local economies • Enhancing the quality of life of local people • Enhancing the tourism appeal of rural areas
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmentally friendly farming • Stewardship practices • Preserving natural resources and ecosystems • Providing scenic beauty and landscapes • Educating visitors about agriculture or nature
Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment to agriculture • Off-farm employment • Historic and cultural preservation • Preserving rural heritage and traditions • Sharing cultural heritage with visitors • Providing recreational activities for visitors • Attracting and retaining a population

Socio-cultural sustainability.

The socio-cultural pillar of sustainable rural development refers to people and their living conditions (Hull Z., 2008), the impact of agritourism from this point of view being dependent on the individuality of the tourist destination and the interaction between tourists and residents (Bello F.G. *et al*, 2017; Muresan I.C *et al*, 2021). The positive social and cultural effects determined by the development of agritourism, may include:

- stopping rural depopulation and improvement of public infrastructure and community services (Lupi *et al*, 2017).
- maintaining traditions, folklore and popular customs, conservation and revitalization of local culture and heritage (Contini C. *et al*, 2009).
- providing jobs for the farmer's family members (Santeramo F.G. and Morelli M., 2014), especially for young people (Ashley C. *et al*, 2007).

- opportunities for the emancipation of women and their employment in non-agricultural activities (Barbieri C., 2013; Kizos T. and Iosifides T., 2007).

- restores pride and identity for rural residents and increase social cohesion in rural communities (Sachaleli N., 2022)

- educating tourists about rural life, agriculture and food production (Sonnino, R. *et al*, 2014).

Economic sustainability

Not only for tourism entrepreneurs, but also for the host community, agritourism provides numerous economic benefits:

- additional income for farmers (Veeck G. *et al*, 2006; Sonnino, R. *et al.*, 2014).

- stimulating local businesses (Sharpley R. and Sharpley J., 1997; Veeck G. *et al*, 2006;

Ollenburg C. and Buckley R., 2007; Tew C. and Barbieri C., 2012).

- new marketing and distribution channels for agricultural products. Agritourism increases the demand not only for the agri-food products obtained at the local level but also for other related rural goods and services. (Tew C. and Barbieri C., 2012).

- stimulating public investments, developing and strengthening local infrastructure (Sharpley R. and Sharpley J., 1997).

- attracting capital from outside the rural area (Sonnino, R. *et al.*, 2014).

- opportunities for business diversification in the rural area (Veeck G. *et al.*, 2006; Ammirato S. and Felicetti A.M., 2014). By connecting the agri-food economy with that of tourism, agritourism generates opportunities for farmers and rural areas to prosper through diversification, value addition, and efficient use of spare or underutilized assets and capacities. (Sachaleli N., 2022).

Ecological sustainability.

Among the favorable benefits generated by agritourism for the host community, those related to the environment are of particular importance for rural sustainability:

- landscape preservation (Lupi C. *et al.*, 2017; Ammirato S. *et al.*, 2020) and ecological improvements in degraded rural areas (Choo H. and Jamal T., 2009; Calza F. *et al.*, 2018).

- protection of the environment (Lupi C. *et al.*, 2017), of ecosystems (Barry J. and Hellerstein D., 2004; Choo H. and Jamal T., 2009), of biodiversity (Mastronardi L. *et al.*, 2015; Ammirato S. *et al.*, 2020; Kothari H. and Perwej A., 2021)

- contribution regarding soil protection and prevention of hydrogeological disasters (Ollenburg C. and Buckley R., 2007).

- conservation of natural resources (Choo H. and Jamal T., 2009; Ammirato S. *et al.*, 2020) and the optimal and responsible use of natural resources and raw materials (Shen F. *et al.*, 2009; Ammirato S. *et al.*, 2020).

- waste reduction (Ammirato S. *et al.*, 2020; Brandth B. and Haugen M.S., 2011).

- encouraging farmers to switch to ecological agriculture, thereby increasing the production of organic and healthier food items ((Kothari H. and Perwej A., 2021), and to adopt environmentally friendly farming practices (Shah C. *et al.*, 2020).

- the implementation in farms of some programs for recycling materials, water conservation or educating tourists on issues related to the conservation and reduction of resource

consumption (Clarke J., 2007; Sharpley R. and Sharpley J., 1997).

- awareness of local population regarding the need to protect the natural environment (Barry J. and Hellerstein D., 2004).

- increasing tourist interaction with farms and rural life may promote understanding and appreciation for agricultural production and landscapes, helping to maintain and improve natural resources (Sachaleli N., 2022).

- stimulating the use of renewable energy and sources of energy with zero impact on the environment (Tew C. and Barbieri C., 2012; Santeramo F.G. and Morelli M., 2014).

- opportunities for revalorizing or reusing agricultural products that could not be sold in traditional ways (Brandth B. and Haugen M.S., 2011).

On the other hand, specialized literature has drawn attention also to the negative impacts that agritourism and rural tourism can generate in rural areas, mainly on the environment, if there is no proper planning and responsible monitoring of tourist activities: excessive use of natural resources, inappropriate land use, soil and footpaths erosion, trampling of vegetation, littering problems, increase in waste production, conflicts between residents and tourists, overcrowding in the rural area, damage to local traditions and customs, disruption of wildlife, air and noise pollution etc. (Grant M. *et al.*, 1997; Almeida F. *et al.*, 2015; Tiraeyari N. and Hamzah A., 2012; Pramanik P.D. and Ingkadijaya R., 2018; Martin J.M. *et al.*, 2018).

Numerous academic papers underline that, while women are more concerned about the impact of agritourism on the environment and more receptive to the socio-cultural benefits (Lepp A., 2007; Mason P. and Cheyne J., 2000; Vargas-Sánchez A. *et al.*, 2011), young people are more interested in the economic impact (Greene S., 2005) and men more enthusiastically support the development of agritourism and are more willing to get involved in this activity (Almeida G.F., 2015).

Most of the time, the inhabitants of the rural environment do not consider "agritourism" as a solution to their problems, and the majority of farmers being followers of traditional agricultural practices (Kothari H. and Perwej A., 2021). But, a key factor for the development of agritourism is represented by the perception and attitude of the rural community regarding its impact, which, in turn, influences the support for its development and sustainability (Martínez González J.A. *et al.*, 2017; Vargas-Sánchez A. *et al.*, 2011). For the overall development of the rural environment, local authorities and governance policy play a vital

role (Khongsatjaviwat D. and Routray J., 2015; Živojinović, I. et al, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The study of specialized literature highlights that the scientific community has a very positive view on agritourism. It is seen as a synergy linking two important sectors for rural areas: tourism and agriculture. Sustainable agritourism is a part of the overall sustainability of rural area and has the potential to be a way of revitalizing local communities, generating benefits for both farmers and the rest of the rural population. In this regard, the existence of a sustainable development strategy and the support of the authorities and the host community are necessary.

REFERENCES

- Ammirato S., Felicetti, A. M., Raso, C., Panser, B. A., Violi A., 2020** - *Agritourism and sustainability: What we can learn from a systematic literature review*. Sustainability, 12(22): 9575.
- Almeida G.F., Balbuena V.A., Cortés M.R., 2015** - *Resident's attitudes towards the impacts of tourism*. Tourism Management Perspectives, 13: 33–40.
- Ashley C., De Brine P.; Lehr A., Wilde H., 2007** - *The Role of the Tourism Sector in Expanding Economic Opportunity, Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative*. Report No. 23; Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA.
- Barbieri C., 2013** - *Assessing the sustainability of agritourism in the US: A comparison between agritourism and other farm entrepreneurial ventures*. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 21: 252–270.
- Barry J., Hellerstein D, 2004** - *Farm recreation*. In: *Outdoor Recreation for 21st Century America: A Report to the Nation: The National Survey on Recreation and the Environment*, Venture Press: State College, PA, USA.
- Bello F.G., Neil C.A.R.R., Lovelock B., Feifei X.U., 2017** - *Local residents' perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Mangochi, Malawi*. Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Research. 5: 1–22.
- Brandth B., Haugen M.S., 2011** - *Farm diversification into tourism—Implications for social identity?*, Journal of Rural Studies, 27: 35–44.
- Calza F., Go F.M., Parmentola A., Trunfio M., 2018** - *European rural entrepreneur and tourism-based diversification: Does national culture matter?* International Journal of Tourism Research, 20(5): 671–683.
- Ciolac R., Adamov T. et al. 2019** - *Agritourism-A Sustainable development factor for improving the 'health' of rural settlements. Case study Apuseni mountains area*. Sustainability, 11: 1467.
- Choo H., Jamal T., 2009** - *Tourism on organic farms in South Korea: A new form of ecotourism?* Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 17(4): 431–454.
- Clarke, J., 2007** - *Marketing Structures for Farm Tourism: Beyond the Individual Provider of Rural Tourism*. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 7: 26–47.
- Contini C., Scarpellini P., Polidori R., 2009** - *Agritourism and rural development: The Low-Valdelsa case, Italy*, Tourism Review, 64: 27–36.
- Grant M., Human B., Le Pelley B., 1997** - *Seasonality*. In: *Insights. Tourism Intelligence Papers*; British Tourist Authority, English Tourist Board: London, UK, pp. 5–9.
- Greene, S., 2005** - *Including young mothers: Community-based participation and the continuum of active citizenship*. Community Development Journal, 42: 167–180.
- Harrington B.L.M., 2016** - *Sustainability Theory and Conceptual Considerations: A Review of Key Ideas for Sustainability and the Rural Context*. Applied Geography, 2(4): 365–382.
- Hodge I.D., 1986** - *The scope and context of rural development*. European Review of Agricultural Economics, 13(3): 271–282.
- Hull Z., 2008** - *Sustainable development: Premises, understanding and prospects*. Sustainable Development, 16(2):73–80.
- Jamieson W.; Noble A., 2000** - *A Manual for Sustainable Tourism Destination Management*. available on-line at: <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/ecotour/etour-principles.html>.
- Khongsatjaviwat D., Routray J., 2015** - *Local government for rural development in Thailand*. International Journal of Rural Management, 11: 3–24.
- Kizos T., Iosifides T., 2007** - *The contradictions of agrotourism development in Greece: Evidence from three case studies*, South European Society and Politics, 12: 59–77.
- Kothari H., Perwej A., 2021**- *Agro Tourism: A Way of Sustainable Development*. Wesleyan Journal of Research, Vol. 13 No. 68.
- Lekić O., Gadžić N., Milovanović, A., 2018** - *Sustainability of Rural Areas - Exploring Values, Challenges, and Socio-Cultural Role*. In book: *Sustainability and Resilience Socio-Spatial Perspective*, TU Delft Open Publisher, pp.171–183.
- Lepp A., 2007** - *Residents' attitudes towards tourism in Bigodi village, Uganda Case study*. Tourism Management, 28: 876–885.
- Lupi, C., Giaccio, V., Mastronardi, L., Giannelli, A., & Scardera, A., 2017** - *Exploring the features of agritourism and its contribution to rural development in Italy*. Land Use Policy, 64: 383–390.
- Martin J.M., Rodríguez J.A., Zermeño K.A., Salinas, J.A., 2018** - *Effects of vacation rental websites on the concentration of tourists—potential environmental impacts. An application to the Balearic Islands in Spain*. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15(2): 347.
- Martínez González J.A., Parra-Lopez E., Buhalis D., 2017** - *The loyalty of young residents in an island destination: An integrated model*. Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 6: 444–455.
- Mason P., Cheyne J., 2000** - *Residents attitudes to proposed tourism development*. Annals of Tourism Research, 27: 391–411.
- Mastronardi L., Giaccio V., Giannelli A., Scardera A., 2015** - *Is agritourism eco-friendly? A comparison between agritourisms and other farms in Italy*

- using farm accountancy data network dataset, SpringerPlus, 4: 1–12.
- McGehee N.G., 2007** - *An Agritourism Systems Model: A Weberian Perspective*, J. Sustain. Tour. nr. 15, 111–124.
- Moraru R.A., 2019** - *The economic impact of tourism activities on agritourism farms*. Lucrări Științifice USAMV - Iași Seria Agronomie, 62(2): 39-44.
- Moraru R.A., Simeanu C., Șumovschi D.C., 2022** - *The environmental impacts of rural tourism*. Lucrări Științifice USAMV – Iași, Seria Agronomie, 65(1): 205-210.
- Muresan I.C., Harun R., Arion F.H., Fatah A.O., Dumitras D.E., 2021** - *Exploring Residents' Perceptions of the Socio-Cultural Benefits of Tourism Development in the Mountain Area*. Societies, 11: 83.
- Ollenburg C., Buckley R., 2007** - *Stated Economic and Social Motivations of Farm Tourism Operators*. Journal of Travel Research, 45: 444–452.
- Park D.B., Lee K.W., Choi H.S., Yoon Y., 2012** - *Factors influencing social capital in rural tourism communities in South Korea*. Tourism Management, 33: 1511–1520.
- Pramanik P.D., Ingkadijaya R., 2018** - *The Impact of Tourism on Village Society and its Environmental*. IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 145: 012060.
- Rodrigues Ferreira D.I., Loures L.C., Sánchez-Martín J.M., 2023** - *Spatial Analysis of Sustainability Measures from Agritourism in Iberian Cross-Border Regions*. Land, 12(4), 826.
- Tew C., Barbieri C., 2012** - *The perceived benefits of agritourism: The provider's perspective*. Tourism Management, 33: 215–224.
- Tiraieyari N., Hamzah A., 2012** - *Agri-tourism: Potential opportunities for farmers and local communities in Malaysia*. African Journal of Agricultural Research, 7(31): 4357–61.
- Sachaleli N., 2022** - *Sustainability of agritourism as a rural development factor*. Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, New Series, Year XIX(1): 77–87.
- Santeramo F.G., Morelli M., 2004** - *Enhancing the foreign demand for agritourism*. Politica Agricola Internazionale .2: 33–42.
- Shah C., Gibson D., Shah S., Pratt, S., 2020** - *Exploring a market for agritourism in Fiji: Tourists' perspective*. Tourism Recreation Research, 45(2): 204–217.
- Sharpley R., Sharpley J., 1997** - *Rural Tourism: An Introduction*. International Thomson Business Press, London, UK.
- Shen F., Cottrell S.P., Hughey K.F.D., Morrison K., 2009** - *Agritourism sustainability in rural mountain areas of China: A community perspective*. International Journal of Business and Globalisation, 3: 123.
- Sobczyk W., 2014** - *Sustainable development of rural areas*. Problems of Sustainable Development, 9(1): 119-126.
- Sonnino R., 2004** - *For a 'Piece of Bread'? Interpreting Sustainable Development through Agritourism in Southern Tuscany*. Sociologia Ruralis, 44: 285–300.
- Tseng M.L., Chang C.H., Wu K.J., Lin C.W.R., Kalnaovkul B., Tan R.R., 2019** - *Sustainable agritourism in Thailand: Modeling business performance and environmental sustainability under uncertainty*. Sustainability, 11(15):.4087.
- Van der Ploeg J.D., Renting H., Brunori G., Knickel K., Mannion J., Marsden T., Ventura F., 2000** - *Rural development: From practices and policies towards theory*, Sociologia Ruralis. 40(4): 391–408.
- Vargas-Sánchez A., Porrás-Bueno N., de los Ángeles Plaza-Mejía M., 2011** - *Explaining residents' attitudes to tourism Is a universal model possible?* Annals of Tourism Research, 38: 460–480.
- Veck G., Che D., Veck A., 2006** - *America's changing farmscape: A study of agricultural tourism in Michigan*, Professional Geographer, 58: 235–248.
- Yang L., 2012** - *Impacts and Challenges in Agritourism Development in Yunnan, China*. Tour. Plan. Dev. nr.9, 369–381.
- Živojinović, I., Ludvig A., Hognl K., 2019** - *Social Innovation to Sustain Rural Communities: Overcoming Institutional Challenges in Serbia*. Sustainability, 11: 7248.
- *** Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program, available on-line at: <https://sarep.ucdavis.edu/sustainable-ag/agritourism>.