



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Agritourism development in Albania

Case of Malësi e Madhe, Belsh and Korça regions

POSITION PAPER



Tirana, 2020

This document was produced in the framework of the Letter of Agreement between the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Rural Association Support Programme, RASP, in Albania. Contributions for the preparation of this paper were provided by Shpresim Domi, PhD, expert in agritourism, Petrit Dobi, Prof. Assoc. expert in rural development, and Roland Bardhi, PhD, expert in rural development. Contributions were also provided by communities in Belsh, Malësi e Madhe and Korça municipality as well as by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FAO.

Photo at the cover page by Jonida Hëna

Agritourism development in Albania

Case of Malësi e Madhe, Belsh and Korça regions

Position paper

December, 2020

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	7
2.	Methodology.....	8
3.	Agritourism in Albania.....	9
	3.1 Agriculture.....	9
	3.2 Tourism.....	10
4.	Defining agritourism.....	12
5.	Potential for agritourism development.....	15
	5.1 Profile of agripreneurs and their agritourism farms in Albania.....	15
	5.2 Agritourism and short value chains.....	16
6.	Policymaking about agritourism: Legal framework, financial and fiscal initiatives.....	18
7.	Stakeholders involved in agritourism development.....	21
8.	Benchmarking: the case of Albania compared to the European region.....	24
9.	Agritourism models in selected municipalities.....	27
	9.1 Belsh Profile (detailed analysis in Annex I).....	27
	9.2 Korça profile (detailed analysis in Annex II).....	28
	9.3 Malësi e Madhe profile (detailed analysis in Annex III).....	29
10.	Conclusions.....	31
11.	Recommendations.....	33
12.	References.....	38
13.	Annexes.....	41

List of tables:

Table 1. Stakeholders involved on agritourism development.....	21
Table 2. A benchmarking analysis: case of Albania and Tuscany	25
Table 3. Stakeholders and/or factors that play a motivating or hindering role in cooperation.....	46
Table 4. Stakeholders and/or factors that have a motivating or hindering role in cooperation.....	51
Table 5. Stakeholders and factors that have a motivating or hindering role in collaboration.....	57

List of figures:

Figure 1. A typology for defining agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010).....	13
Figure 2. The agritourism value chain.....	17

List of annexes:

Annex I. Profile for agritourism in Belsh.....	41
Annex II Profile of agritourism in Korça.....	47
Annex III. Profile for agritourism in Malësi e Madhe.....	52

List of abbreviations:

CAP - Common Agricultural Policy
CSRAD - Cross-cutting Strategy for Rural and Agricultural Development
DPA - Departments of Public Administration
FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP - Gross domestic product
GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
INSTAT - Institute of Statistics in Albania
IPARD - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
IPRD - Integrated Program for Rural Development-100 villages
MARD - Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MCD - Ministerial council decision
MICE - Meetings-Incentives-Conferences-Exhibitions
MONSTAT - Statistical Office of Montenegro
MTE - Ministry of Tourism and Environment
NATP - National Agency for Territory Planning
NFA - National Food Authority
NGOs - Non-Government Organizations
NIPT - Numri Identifikues i Personit të Tatueshëm (NUIS) VAT number
NPRD - National Program for Rural Development
NSPRD - National Strategy Plan for Rural Development
RD - Rural development
UNESCO - United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO - United Nations World Tourism Organization
USAID - United States Agency for International Development
VAT - Value Added Tax
WTTC - World Travel & Tourism Council

1. Introduction

Considering that traditional countryside separated from urban life is no longer valid (Kapferer, 1990), the decrease of the monopoly role of farmers on rural areas development (Van der Ploeg et al., 2000), environmental awareness (Almsteid et al., 2014), viewing rural landscapes as consumption and recreation resource (Lundmark, 2006; Mather et al., 2006), has led to a new model of agricultural development (Ploeg and Roep, 2003). In addition, migration of the human resources and the need for new jobs in the rural communities has led to the rise of new activities and rural enterprises.

Although globalization phenomena has provided opportunities for large enterprises through the economy of scale, on the other hand, small farms and rural communities have remained out of the focus and facing with challenges. Recently, agritourism is considered a new rural enterprise that can foster rural development (RD). This strategy of on-farm activities diversification, can increase employment, protect landscapes (Lupi et al., 2017), prevents depopulation (see e.g., Lupi et al., 2017; Tarolli et al., 2014; Agnoletti et al., 2015, Sharpley, 2002), provide more sustainable techniques of farms productions (Mastronardi et al., 2015, Lupi et al., 2017). Agritourism represents a development strategy for rural marginal areas (Mastronardi and Cipollina, 2009; Belletti, 2010) and an important income

source, especially for small and medium farms. Furthermore, agritourism has gained the policy-makers attention because is considered a catalyst for rural development, particularly in agriculture areas that have experienced declines (Sharpley and Vass, 2006). As a result, with its strong focus on human capital and financial resources, agritourism is a reliable catalyst of policies for rural communitys' development.

Although recently there are policy-making initiatives that are focused on rural development in Albania, and more specifically, about agritourism, on the other hand, there are several challenges that this new model of rural enterprise is dealing with. In this vein, the purpose of this position paper is to examine the current situation of the agritourism development, its challenges, and furthermore, to list several recommendations for future interventions. To achieve this goal, four main objectives are developed and addressed. First objective is to examine the current situation and potentials of the agritourism development. Second, to define agritourism concept, and furthermore, to describe the agritourism typologies, in Albanian context. Third, to identify and describe the stakeholders and their role on agritourism development. Fourth, to describe the past, current policy interventions and propose future interventions.

2. Methodology

In order to examine the agritourism development in Albania, this research project focuses on the case in three areas of Albania: Malesi e Madhe, Belsh and Korça regions. The data and information collection process was organized in three main stages. First, a desk study was undertaken. Through this stage all existing documents (i.e., strategic plans, policy making documents), and initiatives about agritourism, were examined. The source of data/information in this stage was Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE), internet sources, and other scientific papers from international journals. Second, an initial list of 80 stakeholders who were representatives of the target group (i.e., representatives of agritourism, guesthouses, farms, local municipalities, agriculture regional directories and local associations), was derived from different sources such as MARD, MTE, Local municipalities. Additionally, the snowball technique was employed to ensure a better representation of the target group on this research project. Third, three workshops were undertaken based on three target areas. Workshops were organized on different days, and

each one had a duration up to 8 hours. Along this time, at the beginning of the workshops the project goal and objectives were presented. Then the invited expert, presented the agritourism development, and then focusing on the case of Tuscany, Italy. Later, along all three workshops, the world café method was implemented, and the discussions were mostly based on four main issues:

- ✓ Profile of the tourism market in the area. The type of agritourism that exists on these regions. The agritourism farms and its profile. What are the categories of tourists, days of stay and age ranges of visitors?
- ✓ Potentials and tourism values
- ✓ Tourism challenges
- ✓ Stakeholder collaboration in agritourism development

This technique created the opportunity to gather a significant amount of quantitative and qualitative data. Within one month all three workshops were successfully completed, with a total of 89 participants, roughly 30 per workshop. The agritourism analysis and identified profiles of the three target municipalities are included in annexes.

3. Agritourism in Albania

While agriculture and tourism are two crucial priority sectors for Albanian sustainable development, implementing strategies that bring into the practice development paths that interlink these two sectors, is indisputable. Agritourism is a hybrid concept that interconnect two complex industries, agriculture and tourism, and furthermore, a diversifying strategy of agricultural complementary revenue through utilizing on-farm resources.

3.1 Agriculture

Agriculture continues to be a fundamental sector for sustainable development and poverty reduction. In Albania's economy, agricultural sector plays a key role, contributing roughly 20.06% of GDP (INSTAT, 2018). Additionally, the half of Albania's total population live in rural areas and agricultural activities are the major source of their employment and livelihoods (INSTAT, 2018). However, poverty levels in rural areas are twice as high as in urban areas. Thus, sustainable economic growth of Albania is closely related to agriculture and rural development. However, this development implies the need to more efficiently utilize production capacities, in order to increase the supply. It is difficult to describe in this paper all problems of the agricultural sector, since there are too many and complex. One of the concerns is the price-cost squeezes, meaning that prices that farmers receive for their products has decreased in a larger proportion than prices paid for their inputs for the same period of time (Barbieri, 2010). As indicated by the study of Domi (2014), along the period of

one year (2010-2011), production costs of wheat in Albania increased by 45%, while the selling price decreased by 40%, indicating a decline in real farm incomes, and as a result, representing a challenge to deal with.

Due to that, employment is an absolute priority for policy makers in Albania, the need to focus and support sectors that contribute on this issue, is indisputable. Employment for young women and men (age 15-29), is even more significant because they face with additional challenges to have an opportunity for a job. Referring to INSTAT (2018), agriculture/agribusiness system contributes up to 38% of total employment. As regard to the Cross-cutting Strategy for Rural and Agricultural Development 2014-2020 (MARD, 2018) because of the structural changes and continuing decrease of agriculture sector's role on rural development (RD), the level of employment in this sector will decrease with 4% per year until 2020 (130 000 jobs will disappear). This figure indicates that young generation will abandon the rural areas and their engagement on rural enterprises.

While at the beginning of '90s, up to 2/3 of the population was living in rural areas, currently this figure has strongly decreased at 45.4% (MARD, 2018). This situation is created by migration from rural areas to urban areas and emigration outside of Albania. Consequently, agricultural sector is dealing with lack of human resources, and furthermore, youth is abandoning it. Small land sizes and fragmentation is another issue for farmers in Albania. Thus, referring to the MARD (2018) there are up to 350 916 farms with an average surface

per farm roughly 1,2ha, separated into 4.6 parcels (with an average 0.26 ha per parcel). This available land surface is not sufficient for an efficient farm, while in Montenegro the average of arable land per farm is roughly 4.6ha (MONSTAT¹, 2011).

Another issue that agriculture is dealing with is the high level of informality. Referring to INSTAT (2017), up to 9.8% (31,372 farms) are officially registered at the fiscal authorities and the rest (up to 90.2% of the farms) operates informally.

As a result, due to the small size of the farms, price-cost squeezes, limits on human capacities at rural areas, high informality etc., has prompted farmers to consider additional opportunities to better manage their agricultural enterprise. To this, many small farms have considered diversification of their offerings (Barbieri and Valdivia, 2010).

3.2 Tourism

While the distance and length of international trips tend to be shorter, the number of international travelers has increased globally (Domi and Capelleras, 2016). This indicates that traveling is increasingly seen as normality, in some cases even necessity, rather than a luxury. Tourism makes the major contribution to the economies of developed and developing countries (Jones and Haven-Tang, 2005), and as a result, it is the most influential sector for local, regional and national development.

In Albania, tourism is one of the sectors with the greatest potential to foster the country's socio-economic development. Tourism is a fast-growing sector in the

Albanian economy, mainly thanks to its wealth in tourism attraction resources, strategic geographical position, and promotional efforts of the government (Domi et al., 2019). Albania hosted roughly 21 million international visitors along the period 2013–2017, with an average increase up to 12% per year (INSTAT, 2018). The direct contribution of travel and tourism to Albanian GDP accounts for 8.5% and 7.7% of total employment (WTTC, 2018). In fact, Albania is increasingly gaining an international reputation as a tourism destination due to its wealth in mountains, lakes, rivers, seaside and forests, varied wildlife and climates, complemented by a diverse menu of cultural heritage (i.e., archeology, architecture, folklore, and crafts). Due to its geographic position within the European continent, which attracts roughly 51% of world international visitors flow (WTTC, 2018), it has a strong potential opportunity for the tourism industries development.

Most popular types of the tourism that Albanian destination offer are coastal tourism, cultural tourism, tourism in protected areas, nature based tourism, and MICE² tourism (MTE, 2018).

a) Coastal tourism: Seaside tourism in Albania is the main touristic offer and tourism activity. The majority of tourists for this type of tourism come from Albania, Kosovo* and North Macedonia, with a significant increase in visitors from central Europe and the Nordic countries.

b) Cultural tourism: From the international visitors' point of view, this type of tourism represents the most crucial motivation to visit Albania (MTE, 2018). Thus, archeology, heritage

1. Statistical Office of Montenegro

2. Meetings-Incentives-Conferences-Exhibitions

* All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

and culture are identified as the main strengths of Albania's tourism offer. Albania has a large number of cultural monuments (up to 2000), of which three, Berat, Gjirokastra and Butrint, are part of the world heritage and are protected by UNESCO.

c) Tourism in protected areas: In Albania there is up 460.000 ha of the land covered by national protected areas or 16% of the whole territory. These areas are a great potential for tourism development.

d) Nature based tourism: Albania has so far been praised by many international visitors for its landscape, nature, beautiful scenery, which are also regarded as Albania's strengths. These areas provide a great potential for rural tourism, agritourism, mountain tourism, biking, ecotourism, outdoor activities (rafting, parachuting, mountain biking, fishing, trekking, mountaineering, hiking, horseback riding, study tours, etc.). Referring to the MTE (2018) there is an increase on the demand about these types of tourism, mostly by international visitors.

e) MICE Tourism: this type of tourism is not much developed. MICE Tourism is mostly developed at the national level. However, there is no consolidated network of stakeholders involved in organizing MICE tourism.

Although tourism is currently one of the sectors with the greatest potential in terms of the socioeconomic development in Albania and a priority for policy-makers, on the other hand, it is still in its early stage of development and faces several challenges. Property rights issues, high levels of

informality, underdeveloped infrastructure, seasonality, and inadequately educated workforce are major concerns (Domi et al., 2020).

Besides the importance of tourism in general, rural tourism has a great potential, as well. Rural tourism contributes to the diversification of farming income, prevent emigration, encourage the cultural exchange between urban and rural areas, promote the traditional values of rural life, and also contributes to the general diversification of the economy (Telleschi, 1992; Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997; Roberts and Hall, 2001). UNWTO (2017) indicates that rural tourism activities take place in rural areas with a low population density, landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry, traditional social structure and lifestyle etc. Recently rural tourism has significantly attracted the attention of local, regional, national and international policy-makers. Albania is known for its rich biological and natural diversity due to the geographic position of the country as well as the geological, hydrological, climatic, land and relief characteristics. Despite its great potential and significant effect on the wellbeing of rural communities, rural tourism still remains poorly developed and currently generates a small share of tourism income in Albania. Rural tourism is yet concentrated into a limited number of regions, mainly in the northern Alps (Vermosh, Theth and Valbona) and southeast (Voskopoja and Vithkuq). While there are several other marginalized areas which has a potential for this type of tourism (e.g. Kukes, Librazhd, Skrapar, Diber etc).

4. Defining agritourism

While rural tourism is based on rural amenities (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005), one of the most crucial dimensions of rural tourism is agritourism. Agritourism is a sub-set of rural tourism (Ainley and Smale, 2010) and a strategy and/or method of supplementing agricultural revenue through utilizing on-farm resources (Hjalager, 1996; Sharpley and Vass, 2006). While rural tourism is strictly dedicated to tourism products, services and activities that are related to the local areas and inhabitants, the agritourism also adds the farming component to the tourism services and facilities, involving the tourists in the basic activities of the rural accommodation unit (e.g., growing vegetables, food processing, animal care) (Sima, 2016).

To define agritourism several concepts are used interchangeably. Thus, labels such as agrotourism, farm tourism, farm-based tourism, and vacation farms are often used interchangeably with agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008).

There are several comprehensive definitions about agritourism. Scholars (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; Blacka et al., 2001; Che et al., 2005) have defined agritourism as a set of services offered with the purpose of attracting visitors to the farm, such as accommodations, recreational opportunities and food. Arroyo et al. (2013) defined agritourism as “farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes” (p. 45). Maetzold (2002) views agritourism as an alternative

enterprise that links agricultural production with travel to the farm. Although there are several synonymous labels used to describe adoption of tourism activities into the working farm activities, all of these definitions describe the tourism activities as a supplemental one, while agricultural activities remains the primary focus in terms of the time engagement. In addition, referring to the most known case of agritourism development, the Tuscany region, Italy, its regional law³ defines agritourism as those “...farms that provides accommodation; organizes educational, informative, cultural, social, traditional and recreational activities; offers food and beverages, tastings, produces and offer local products as well as products certificated as Tuscan origin”. More specifically, referring to this Regional Law, at the article 5 “The operation of the agritourism is reserved for agricultural entrepreneurs...” (p. 3). Agriculture activities are fundamental for the agritourism farm and tourism should be a complimentary dimension. This predominance of agricultural activity is fixed in terms of working hours and not in terms of revenues. As regard to the Albanian context this concept is well defined at the tourism law⁴. Thus, on tourism law (chapter 1, article 4) agritourism is defined “as the hosting activity, which takes place on a farm or other agricultural unit, with the aim of attracting visitors, often enabling them to participate in agricultural or other ancillary activities taking place in that agricultural environment” (p. 2). In addition,

3. Legge regionale 23 Giugno, 2003, no. 30.

4. Ligji nr. 93/2015, Për turizmin (Law No. 93/2015, For Tourism

into this law agritourism is described as the activity that “supports the development of sustainable tourism in rural areas through environmental protection, preservation of traditions and promotion of typical products of the area” (p.2).

Addressing the vague concept of agritourism is crucial to better understand and describe the situation in practice. Thus, to better understand the current situation of agritourism development in Albania, it is necessary to explain the typology of agritourism farms that already exists. In this vein, Phillip et al. (2010) addressed the issue on what concerns the agritourism typology. Through their study, Phillip et al. (2010) provided a comprehensive analysis of the existing theoretical and practical evidence in the field, and propose a five typologies of the agritourism farms, as follows:

1. Agritourism in a non-working farm⁵; the housing place was previously a farm dedicated to rural activities but

presently is not connected with the farming component.

2. Agritourism in a working farm⁶ but with passive tourists’ contact; the working farm only provides the background for tourism.

3. Agritourism in a working farm, with indirect tourists’ contact; the locally produced agricultural products or services are integrated in the consumption process of the tourists.

4. Agritourism in a working farm, direct contact, staged agritourism; tourists are presented with different aspects of rural life.

5. Agritourism in a working farm, direct contact, authentic agritourism; tourists are actively involved in different rural activities developed within the farm.

Based on the existing definitions of agritourism, it can be assumed that the term “a working farm” is the place where agricultural activities are practiced.

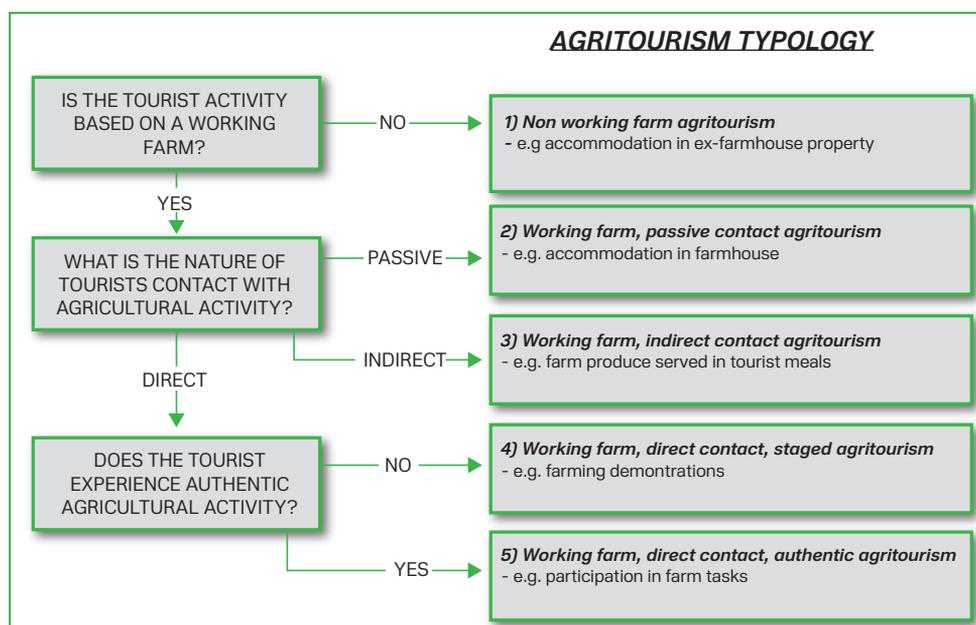


Figure 1. A typology for defining agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010)

5. Non-working farm examples: agricultural heritage or imagery (e.g. accommodation in a converted farm house).

6. A working farm is the place where agricultural activities are practiced.

These typologies of agritourism would be a good start to reflect the real potential of agritourism development in Albania. Although, Phillip et al. (2010) have proposed five typologies, most spread agritourism typologies on the three target regions are typology 1, 2, 3. The major part are those of typologies 1 and 2. For example, a restaurant which buys local products (e.g., Seferan in Belsh) or a typical guesthouse which also buys products at local farmers (e.g., guest houses in Malesia e Madhe, and Korça), are classified by their owners as agritourism. However, referring to the current MCD these cases cannot be certified as agritourism because they do not fulfill simultaneously three conditions (i.e., accommodation, recreational activities, and food and beverage services). Although the typology 1 is well spread in three regions and in Albania in general, we do not suggest to be considered at the regulation framework as an agritourism farm. This typology does not consider the working farm as a core component of doing agritourism. In this

vein, this typology is classified by scholars as one of the most controversial typology. Finally, in Albania this typology is mostly known as “guesthouse” (guesthouses in Malesi e Madhe, Korça, Belsh), which differ from agritourism. Consequently, this typology is closer related to rural tourism than agritourism. As regard to the typologies 2, 3, and 4, we strongly suggest to be part of the new legal framework as appropriate for being agritourism. These typologies exist in the three regions part of the target areas, and beyond. These three typologies are linked to those working farms that provide accommodation in the farm-house, food and beverage services, recreational activities, demonstrating farm activities to the visitors etc. So the working farm is the core component of these typologies. As regard to the fifth typology, due to its complexity of the activities offered, the fifth typology exists but is rare. This is the highest level of an agritourism entity, and represent a farm deeply diversified in terms of its activities (e.g., Mrizi i Zanave, Huqi Agritourism etc.).

5. Potential for agritourism development

Recently agritourism is strongly argued as a tool for rural development. This tool of on-farm activities diversification, attract visitors into the rural areas, increase revenues and employment, value landscapes, provide more sustainable production techniques in congruence to the environment, prevents depopulation and the abandonment of traditional cultures. In this vein, to have a viable growth and to effectively meet new societal demands, many small farms have considered diversification of their offerings, through adopting tourism activities into their farms' operations, and by transforming into agritourism farms.

Albania is a suitable destination for agritourism development due to its wide range of nature-based and agricultural resources. Albania is known for its rich biological and natural diversity due to the geographic position of the country as well as the geological, hydrological, climatic, land and relief characteristics. Albania has also a rich flora with 3250 plant species or about 30% of European flora, and furthermore, up to 91 endangered species all over the world (MARD, 2018). Albania is a suitable destination for agritourism development due to its diverse agro-climatic conditions, for growing crops, fruits, vegetables and trees. Schilling and Sullivan (2014) concluded that fruit/vegetable farms, rural residential/retirement farms, intermediate-scale farms are more likely to offer agritourism. Those farms that implement organic production techniques and farm conservation practices, are more likely to be transformed into agritourism. In Albania there are several active units (farms, exporters, agribusiness units etc.) which are officially certified as organic products

providers. In addition, livestock farms, small-scale farms, those that are managed by young farmers, intensively use the land for their activities, have higher chances to be transformed into agritourism (Lupi et al., 2017). Furthermore, roughly 37% of Albanian territory is covered by forests (INSTAT, 2017), and 12.57% by Protected Areas (PA). Farms, whose surface falls within environmentally protected areas are more likely to offer agritourism. As a result, Albania has a significant opportunity to foster agritourism development.

Finally, although rural areas offer a wide range of tourism attractions such as natural sights, traditional foods, an rich flora and fauna etc., there is no consolidated development of agritourism in practice, because until now there are only a limited number of agritourism entities that are certified as such.

5.1 Profile of agripreneurs and their agritourism farms in Albania

Referring to the MTE and MARD, there are only 23 farms certified as Agritourism, while farms that have the potentials to be transformed into agritourism farms, are much more than this figure.

Agritourism development in Albania has a short life-span (roughly 5 years), and agritourism is a family business. The short lifespan can be originated from the fact that agritourism activities started quite recently in Albania. Agritourism is mostly managed by younger managers (on average roughly 35 years old),

representing a young age of agripreneurs (i.e., agricultural entrepreneurs). This figure reflects the average age of the Albanian population (39 years old). This is an optimistic result, due to the fact that youth are constantly abandoning the rural areas. Even retired people are interested to have an agritourism farm, which indicates the wide range of the age of the owners. In this vein there are no differences among female and male operators in terms of managing the agritourism farm. This is in line with international studies about gender issue on agritourism management (See e.g., Babrieri and Mshenga 2008; Darque, 1988; Giraud and Rémy 2013; Wright and Annes, 2014). Several scholars have argued that women are perceived to be particularly well suited to agritourism due to their traditional role on the family farm. To this, they are perceived to have more specialized competencies on cleaning, cooking, and care work which are part of the core activities into the daily management of agritourism. However, women agripreneurs face with challenges such as less access to subsidies and credits (Little and Jones 2000; Bock, 2004).

The educational background of agripreneurs is mostly on economy, agriculture, tourism, and biotechnology. The average farm size is roughly 7.3ha, which is higher than the average for Albanian farms (1.2ha). The larger size of agritourism farms compared to the agricultural farms is due to the fact that agritourism offers diverse activities (e.g., hiking, biking, equitation, fairs, festivals, restaurants etc.) which requires more land. In other words, a farm that offer or aim to offer a complex and/or a set of diverse activities normally needs a higher land surface than an agricultural farm. Additionally, another reason behind this difference on land surface is related to the profitability. Thus, when a farm is experiencing profits, continuously invests

in order to increase its production, and as a result, enhances its land surface. In case of Albania, where the land market is not active, an agritourism farm may fulfil its tasks by cooperation with neighboring farms and share the production of the wide range of products with other farms. Location is important for agritourism farms due to their aim to attract visitors. Agritourism cannot exist in isolation from other tourism traffic. In this vein, results indicate that most farms are located less than 30km far from an urban area of at least 50,000 inhabitants. In addition, 10 out of 11 farms reported that are located less than 9 km far from a highway.

5.2 Agritourism and short value chains

Describing the value chain of agritourism is complex due to its direct link with two sectors, agriculture and tourism. Thus, it is necessary to explain the relationships of agritourism with agriculture and stakeholders in tourism.

The classic manner of marketing of agricultural products and partnerships (i.e., with other stakeholders in the value chain) of the farms was through roadside sales, selling at the wholesalers, processors, retailers, or in some cases direct sale at the markets. Transforming the farm into an agritourism facility has radically changed the role of farms in the value chain. To this, agritourism farms became crucial players on the value chain. Agritourism farms sell their products at the farm through serving at the restaurants, providing meals at the accommodation units, and direct sale of the fresh products to the visitors etc. As a result, agritourism has shortened the agricultural value chains in the favor of the farm. For example, the case of Mrizi

i Zanave⁷, has a partnership with roughly 400 other farms or suppliers, in order to meet the demand for products at the accommodation (guest house), restaurant, catering, degustation, and direct sale at the farm. Furthermore, some agritourism farms established partnership with other agricultural farms, in order to ensure the sale of their products. Thus, there are agritourism farms that provide spaces (e.g., in the restaurants or other parts of the farm), to the local farms to sell their fresh products, while benefiting from the presence of the visitors at the agritourism farm. This new marketing method or partnership, allow farmers to retain a higher price of the final value of products, and as a result, to respond to the price squeeze issue. In addition, shortening the value chains is a farms' strategy to capture new segments of demand for local and fresh food, rural amenities etc. Another specialty of the agritourism farms is producing and selling locally related origin products. Origin products are those that are closely related to a geographic location in terms of biodiversity, are traditionally produced in this area (history), and are produced by people of this geographic location. These products are considered a path to link people, places and products (Vandecandelaere, 2009). Origin products are considered as the one of the most important reason to visit agritourism farms.

The agritourism value chain is also connected to the generic tourism value chain. Thus, agritourism farms are closely interacting with tourism agencies and hosting groups of tourist. In addition, several agritourism farms have their own website, social media etc. which are used as instruments for direct communication with their customers.

Generally speaking, agritourism has created value through its activities by involving several other stakeholders in its value chain and creating various interdependencies and dynamics (see Figure 2). Additionally, agritourism enterprise has shortened the value chains, and as a result, it has created the opportunity to the farms to have direct contact with its customers.

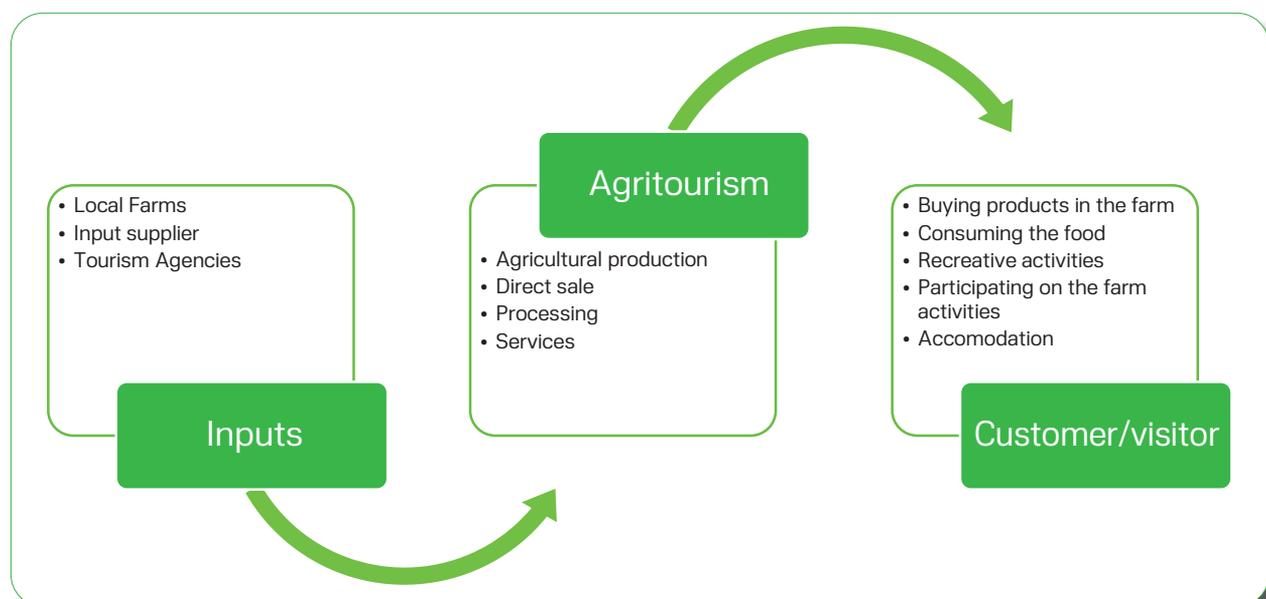


Figure 2. The agritourism value chain

7. Mrizi i Zanave is one of the first agritourism farms in Albania. It is located in the north of the country, in Lezha district. This farm replied the Italian model of agritourism development, but strongly adjusting to local area features in terms of culture, culinary, etc.

6. Policymaking about agritourism: Legal framework, financial and fiscal initiatives

This new path of organizing on-farm activities provides the farmers new profitable markets for farm products and provide travel experiences for a new and large market (Wicks and Merrett, 2003). Agritourism lately has gained the policy-makers' attention because it is considered a catalyst for rural development, particularly in agricultural areas that have experienced declines (Sharpley and Vass, 2006).

Agritourism in Albania is considered as a diversifying activity for on-farm activities that foster rural development (MARD, 2018). As such, it is obvious that the development of rural areas will need strong support and guidance by policymakers (local and central). As an example, this could be done through the elaboration of a national agritourism strategy, but this is not developed yet. There are several initiatives that are focusing on rural development, and more specifically on agritourism development, reflecting a significant prioritization at the level of national policymaking.

Until 2017, the concept of agritourism was only mentioned in the tourism law⁸ and at the development strategies, as a tool for rural development, but initiatives were not undertaken by local/central governments. Within the tourism law, agritourism is only partly mentioned. Thus, the article 4 of this law, define the agritourism concept, while on the article 19 agritourism is mentioned as one of the types of tourism at the local level initiatives.

The current legal framework about agritourism development, is limited. Only along 2018, the Albanian Government has undertaken specific initiatives in terms of the regulations, and development programs which specifically aimed to foster agritourism, as tool for rural development. Thus, the Government has approved and established a procedure to formally identify and register agritourism farms which operate in Albania and this is still an ongoing process. This means that, until that time, agritourism farms have been operating as informal enterprises, and consequently, official statistics lack information about them. In this vein, a Ministerial council decision⁹ (MCD), is approved for this purpose. This MCD used the same definition about agritourism, as in the Tourism Law. Based on this MCD, an inter-ministerial commission, named Evaluation Commission, was established. This commission is sub-ordinated to the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and manages the applications made by farmers or other interested investors who intend to manage agritourism. This commission is composed of 5 members, wherein three of them are from Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and the rest (two) are from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Based on the Commission's decision-making, the Minister responsible for tourism issues the certificate "Certified Agritourism entity". The certificate is issued for a period of 5 years. In the cases where

8. Law "no. 93/2015 për turizmin"

9. MCD No. 22, date 12.1.2018.

a certified agritourism does not respect the conditions foreseen in this MCD, commission has the right to suspend and or revoke/cancel the issued certification. However, agritourism has the right to apply again when it fulfills all condition required by the MCD.

The National Strategy for Rural Development 2014-2020, was adjusted, through adopting a national program named Integrated Program for Rural Development-100 villages (IPRD), for the period of 2018-2020. Through IPRD, 100 villages are identified wherein to fulfill three main objectives; (1) Creation of Albanian agritourism network, (2) Incubator network of traditional products, (3) Network of brands/shops of Albanian and traditional products. Obviously, agritourism is argued as a significant tool to achieve these objectives. The National Agency for Territory Planning (NATP) is in charge for the IPRD implementation. It should be mentioned that all three target areas in this Position Paper are part of the above mentioned 100 villages, which are assumed to have a great potential for rural tourism and more specifically agritourism development.

In sum, current legal/regulation framework about agritourism, reflects four main issues:

- The lack of a law about agritourism which would better ensure the agritourism development;
- The confusion about which of the two above mentioned ministries has the competence on agritourism development;
- Lack of a specialized and dedicated structure into the central/local

governments, for the agritourism development;

- Lack of specific incentives to foster agritourism development such as incentives to foster as cooperation, networking, cluster between agritourism farms and other rural stakeholders (enterprises, local governments, NGO etc.).

There are two national financial schemes (grants) which are also related directly and indirectly to the agritourism development. First, the National Scheme¹⁰, which is 100% financed by Albanian Government. This scheme provides financial support up to 50% of the total investments, but not more than 40 000 Euro in absolute value per project. This grant is dedicated for those who intend to build and/or reconstruct the premises for rural or agritourism activities with 6 to 10 rooms. In addition, this grant scheme provides financing for those who provide an agritourism business plan, up to 50% of planned investments, but not more than 81 000 Euro. Those who benefit from this scheme, will be excluded from the opportunity to be supported by IPARD II program, following the rules on the double funding.

Second, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD) focuses on rural areas and the agri-food sectors of countries in the process EU accession. IPARD is part of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), designed to support reforms in the pre-accession countries. IPARD is an important program which is currently providing grants for investments in agriculture, including agritourism is also a part of it. These grant scheme is a combination of EU contribution (65%) and Albanian contribution (35%).

10. <http://www.azhbr.gov.al/skema-kombetare/>

In this vein, different stakeholders (local NGOs, farmers, farmer associations, and other public-private stakeholders) who intend to invest in agritourism such as reconstructing an old house for visitor accommodation, producing local traditional food, transforming farms into an agritourism farm etc., will be granted up to 70% of total investment (if the applicant is based at mountains areas), and the investment intended, in absolute value, should be within 10 000 Euro and 400 000 Euro.

It is necessary to mention these financing schemes are considered as significant sources to foster the development of agritourism. Thus, Galluzzo et al. (2017), investigating the case of agritourism in Italian countryside, concluded that financial subsidies allocated by the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) foster agritourism development. In this vein, in the case of Romania, Bhatta, K. (2019) also concluded that agritourism has benefited significantly from financial subsidies allocated by the CAP. However, there are several challenges that farmers and other investors who aim to invest in agritourism, are facing. First, the lack of land ownership certificate is the biggest obstacle. Although this is a national issue, at the case of Malesi e Madhe, this is the major challenge that hinder the investments. Second, the huge number of documents to apply for IPARD schemes, and the need to make the entire investment, before the applicant is granted, are other obstacles. Third, farmers are concerned about the transparency of the grant schemes in general and the about the way of getting information about calls, the deadlines, documents etc.

Another significant initiative is the fiscal policy undertaken by central government. The VAT is reduced from 20% to 6%, and tax on income is reduced from 15% to 5%, for those who will be certified as “The certified subject of agritourism”. Although this fiscal policy seems as an incentive to urge farmers to open their farms to the visitors, it is worth to mention that due to the significant level of the informality at the agricultural sector, this fiscal policy is a path to formalize the sector. Referring to INSTAT (2017), up to 9.8% (31,372 farms) are officially registered at the fiscal authorities and the rest (up to 90.2% of the farms) operate informally. The challenge of these fiscal initiatives is that currently 90.2% of the farms, who are not formally registered (those who do not have a NIPT), are not paying any VAT or income tax. Therefore the challenge is their motivation to consider their farm transformation into agritourism farms.

7. Stakeholders involved in agritourism development

As indicated in Table 1, there are several stakeholders involved in agritourism development. Their involvement is direct and indirect. Some of the stakeholders are currently active and some others are not. More specifically, the following table shows the stakeholders and their role on agritourism development.

Table 1. Stakeholders involved on agritourism development

Stakeholders at national level	The role
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)	The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is directly involved in agritourism development. MARD is directly involved in providing financial support through the National schemes and the IPARD II program (2014–2020). In addition, this Ministry coordinates the involvement of other foreign/international donors such as GIZ, FAO, and USAID. MARD is represented at the inter-ministerial commission which certifies the agritourism farms.
National Food Authority (NFA)	The National Food Authority (NFA) is the competent authority with inspection functions for management at the national level of food safety and consumer protection, plant protection and animal health. NFA leads the process of risk assessment in the field of animal feed, food and plant protection. Plans, coordinates and exercises official control of food and feed for animals and plant protection. Ensures the unification of food safety and animal food safety control practices and plant protection nationwide. Carries out preliminary inspections to verify whether the technical-technological, hygienic-sanitary, phytosanitary, and veterinary requirements have been met, verification of the necessary documentation for the registration and licensing of food business operators and plant protection.
Extension service (central structure)	This stakeholder is directly involved in agritourism development. Recently a new structural reform, has re-organized this sector as a region-based services. Farmers states that this services is not as effective as expected, and do not feel their role on their daily farming. However, the extension specialists do not have proper infrastructure to operate, and they need immediate trainings, in order to update and refresh their knowledge.
Ministry of Tourism and Environment	This ministry is directly involved in the agritourism development. This Ministry has the majority on the inter-ministerial commission ¹¹ that certifies the agritourism farms. In addition, while the agritourism concept is mentioned within the Tourism Law ¹² , there is no special competence given to this Ministry about agritourism development.
The National Agency for Territory Planning (NATP)	This stakeholder is directly related to the agritourism development. NATP is in charge for the IPRD program implementation, wherein agritourism is one of its important pillars. However, recently this agency has not been active about any initiative for agritourism development.
National Institute of statistics (INSTAT)	INSTAT is indirectly related to the agritourism development. This institute might be a stakeholder with an important role through providing data and information such as the trends of the visitors for agritourism etc. However, this institute does not provide any data and information about rural tourism, and furthermore, about agritourism. The data provided by this institute are only about tourism in general such interventional and national visitors flow, their motivation, number of accommodation units and other touristic destinations etc.

11. This commission is composed by 5 members (3 are representatives of the Ministry of tourism and Environment, and 2 others representatives of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development).

12. The law no. 93/2015 for the tourism.

Stakeholders at national level	The role
Academia	<p>Academia is indirectly related to the agritourism development. At the Agriculture University of Tirana, there is a department named Rural Tourism Management, which has a curricula with a specific focus on rural tourism and agritourism development. This department offers studies program at the Bachelor and Master level. Each year the number of students graduated are roughly 70-80 at the Bachelor level, and 15-20 for the Master level. This profile of tourism is only provided by this university. Along the period of 2016-2019, the number of registered students, at this study program, increased from 67 to 90.</p> <p>At the University of Tirana there is a study program on tourism in general, but it does not focus on the rural tourism. This study program is provided at the Bachelor and Master levels. At University of "Aleksander Moisiu" there is also a study program on Hotel-Tourism Management. There are also some other private Universities that offer these study programs.</p>
Donors and NGOs	<p>These stakeholders are directly related to the agritourism development, and currently are active. Recently several foreign donors are directly engaged in agritourism development. Some of these international donors are FAO, USAID¹³ ¹⁴ and GIZ¹⁵. USAID has financially supported the project in Belsh, in Seferan village where an agritourism facility was established as a network between a restaurant, near the lake, a guest house and the local farmers. GIZ is currently aiming to undertake a national study about the current situation of the agritourism development, and future needed interventions.</p>
Consumers/tourist market	<p>These stakeholders are directly related to the agritourism development. Customers play the crucial role in fostering agritourism development. There is a growing demand to visit the rural spaces, to eat origin products, to be engaged into the agricultural activities etc. In this vein, this growing demand for agriculture amenities, has urged farmers to open their farm toward visitors. Referring to the Domi et al. (2019) study, all agritourism farms in Albania had an average number of visitors per week roughly 400-600, coming most frequently visited in spring season, mainly at weekends. Considering the categories of visitors who visited agritourism farms, along 2018, are Albanian citizens, visitors from Europe and families with young children. In addition, other targets such as young people, retired, school groups and other organized groups, are also important but the least frequent.</p>
Local level stakeholders	
Local governments	<p>These stakeholders are directly related to the agritourism development. Article 19 of the Tourism law, emphasize the role of local governments "to contribute to the development of different types of tourism at the local level, such as cultural tourism, agritourism etc., based on tourism resources". In some cases local governments (municipalities) influence directly and indirectly the flow of tourism at the local enterprises, through organizing massive events such as carnivals, local products fairs, festivals, etc. These events could attract visitors to the agritourism farms. In addition, through restoration and maintaining of the cultural sites, natural monuments, pictures landscapes and other local tourism attraction, local governments can affect the number of tourism flow at the area.</p>
Extension services (local level)	<p>This stakeholder is directly related to the agritourism development, and currently not active. Their direct contact with farmers, through consulting them, might positively influence the number of agritourism farms.</p>

13. <https://www.usaid.gov/albania/news-information/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-agrotourism-albania>

14. <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/albania/news-information/press-releases/united-states-sweden-announce-albania%E2%80%99s-1st-tourism>

15. <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/82937.html>

Stakeholders at national level	The role
Tourism agencies	<p>Tourism agencies are directly related to the agritourism development. Tourism agencies play a significant role in increasing tourists' visits and mostly, at the international level for agritourism. However, along the discussion with operators of agritourism, farmers, guesthouse owners, they stated the tourism agencies are those who dictate their cooperation, by influencing on the type of services offered to the tourists, in order to rise the profit margin etc. Dictating of the type of service offered, is a negative dimension on this cooperation, because this could damage agritourism's image toward visitors, and later they might not repeat their visit.</p>
Farmers	<p>Farmers are directly involved in agritourism development, and currently are active. They are the most important stakeholder related to the agritourism due to that farmers are the major suppliers to the agritourism farms and their restaurants, with local products (origin products). The main commercial channels of the origin products are international markets and direct sale through agritourism farms. Local products constitute a significant attraction for visitors into the farm. Sometimes, farmers offer local products and local plant varieties to local markets and restaurants. Actually, there is no policy to emphasize the sustainability of these products. Local varieties or local breeds are mainly managed and reproduced by the farmers, without any collaboration with Genetic bank and research institutes to guarantee protection of these varieties</p>
Small agritourist services	<p>Small agritourist services (restaurants, B&B) are very important local stakeholders in developing agritourism. These types of services are an important branch of agritourism activities. Some agritourist businesses as "Mrizi I Zanave" use local plants, vegetable and fruit varieties which are grown in the wild, which practice may endanger these species and varieties and reduce biodiversity and agrobiodiversity Increase and development of such businesses in rural areas may bring the risk of increasing pollution, as far as in these areas the management of waste produced during their activity is not yet fully resolved.</p>

8. Benchmarking: the case of Albania compared to the European region

Agritourism is a phenomenon already spread to all over the European continent, and also at Balkan countries and Eastern Europe. In Croatia, the first tourist family farms were registered in 1998, and operate in accordance with the law about catering business (Grgić, 2015). In Romania, agritourism activities are encouraged by the national Government according to the provisions of the Tourism Law (chapter VI). This law describes agritourism as a rural tourism activity. This law defines the promotion of the rural areas with high potential, the necessary information about rural tourism opportunities, encouraging development of natural traditional products and issuing authorizations for guest houses (Romanian Parliament, 2017). Romania began its active development of rural tourism at the end of the 1990's. According to Petrović et al. (2015) study, there are about 400 agritourist accommodation units in business which are encouraged by the National Program for Rural Development (NPRD) and the National Strategy Plan for Rural Development (NSPRD). In Romania there is a successful financing scheme of PNDR 2014–2020 with an allocation over 50 million euro to the development of agritourism (NRDP, 2017).

As in Romania, rural tourism and agritourist accommodation units (i.e., agritourism) in Croatia also began their development at the end of 1990's, and have constantly growing in the years that followed. Today, in Croatia there are 352 registered tourist farm stays with about 900 beds. The greatest number of registered units is located close to the coastal areas.

In case of Serbia the concept of agritourism is defined as farm stays and agritourist accommodation units. Agritourism in Serbia is defined as offering “rural surroundings” to a tourist through provision of unique experience of people, culture and nature and enabling them to enjoy in an authentic way of rural life (Cvijanović, 2017). Thus, the concept of agritourism is used interchangeably with rural tourism. According to the data obtained from the employees of the Association “Rural tourism in Serbia”, by the end of 2013 there were 970 registered places, which could be classified as farm stays and self-service beds.

In Hungary agritourist accommodation units has a capacity of 15,000 beds, which represents about 5% of the tourist offer of this country (Petrović et al., 2015). In the case of Greece the concept of agritourism development is exploited as a way of protection of traditional values and ethnographic heritage, and as a result, its economic impact is considered as very important for the rural areas (Petrović et al., 2015).

Although agritourism is a worldwide phenomenon, in Italy it has taken a substantial economic and social relevance, and representing probably the most radical innovation that has ever concerned the national agriculture (Esposti, 2012). Italian national legislation regulates agritourism in a different manner with respect to other forms of rural tourism, in this way representing a uniqueness in the international scene (Santucci, 2013). In fact, in Italy agritourism can only be

performed by the farmer and his family members (Law n. 96/2006). Moreover, the tourism activities of the farm must be connected to agriculture, which remains the fundamental enterprise of the farm. This predominance of agricultural activity is fixed in terms of working hours and not in terms of income. Therefore, in Italy agritourism cannot exist without farming, where the farmer is forced to dedicate himself mainly to agricultural practices.

Agritourism development at the Tuscany region has a historical path, which Randelli et al. (2014) divided into three periods. First, the path creation period (1951–1985). This period was characterized by widespread availability of empty buildings on farms, a large number of remote houses, a heritage of the previous agricultural system, occupied by new residents who most of them were foreigners from England, France, Germany, Switzerland and USA, or Italians from the main Italian cities (Milan, Rome, Naples, etc.) and Tuscany (Florence, Prato, Siena). Due to a strong business background, new capabilities and an international web of contacts, they

had a leading role in the transition towards the development of agritourism. Second, the period of growth (1985–2007). Along this period Tuscany region was the first to legislate on agritourism. A set of networks were established enabling stakeholders to jointly develop resources such as local traditions, art forms, celebrations, experiences, entrepreneurship, and knowledge (Saxena and Ilbery, 2008). In order to encourage repeat visits and longer stays, many agritourism farms offered specialized agricultural products and activities (wine tasting). Third period is that of maturity characterized by a stable number of agritourism farms which need mostly to focus on improving their quality, and further diversify their offerings.

Due to that agritourism model of Tuscany is considered as one of the best model. Table 2 represents a benchmarking of this case with the Albanian model of agritourism development. Through this benchmarking, the paper aims to seek the best practices by comparing Tuscany model with Albanian case.

Table 2. A benchmarking analysis: case of Albania and Tuscany

Component	Agritourism in Tuscany, Italy	Agritourism in Albania
The model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large size of agritourism farm in terms of surface • Self-financing • Managed by family • Most have restaurants where they sell processed products. • Farm processing its production (mainly wine) and agritourism in houses originating from the medieval times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly small, isolated enterprises • Self-financing • Managed by family • The owner are mostly former emigrants with international experience • Most have restaurants where they sell processed products. • Farm to Table restaurant. • Farms process their production.
Regulation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law dedicated to the agritourism (Regional law no 30/2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept of the agritourism is defined at the Tourism Law (The law no. 93/2015, for tourism) • There is a Ministerial council decision about the procedures of certifying agritourism facilities
Number of agritourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.620 agritourism farms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified as a Certified Agritourism entity ("Subjekt i çertifikuar Agroturizmi") are 23 • Up to 90 farms has potentials in the short/mid-terms to be transformed into agritourism.
Lifespan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ≈20 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ≈5 years

Component	Agritourism in Tuscany, Italy	Agritourism in Albania
Ownership (Agripreneurs) and the age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agripreneur (farmer) • The age of the agripreneur falls into 41-64 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The owner with a background as a former entrepreneur or has restaurant experience. • Very few farmers are active in agritourism • The age of the agripreneur falls into 25-44 years
Agripreneurs' background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture (50.9% of 292 interviewed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic studies (6 out of 11 interviewed)
Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 105ha 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7.3ha
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set around a tourist center with picturesque landscapes • Agriculture throughout the year • A distance from a city with 50 000 inhabitants ≈30-59 km • A distance from an highway ≈1-9km 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location with a picturesque view • Agriculture throughout the year • A distance from a city with 50 000 inhabitants ≈5-29 km (45%) • A distance from an highway ≈1-9km
Revenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly from stays / accommodation in (30-70% of total income) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restaurant and farm product sale
Production and offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of large scale branded wine and olive oil, marketed at home and abroad. • Wine production, and typical products of the area (Origin products) • Branded wine, picturesque surroundings, eco-tourism, cities traditions and culture, history, festivals (massive events). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly small production and consumed at the farm's own restaurant. • Mostly products are not branded (except wine) • Cheap destination, picturesque landscapes, Slow-food, and local cuisine, history, music and dance culture.
Cooperation/ networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the agritourism farms are part of different networks (e.g., Chianti Classico Wine Consortium) and they collectively sell the wine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of farm markets or consortia
Visitors (costumer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign tourists from Western Europe, US and East Asia • There are country specific promotion strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly local visitors, food enthusiasts • Those few foreign tourists are the result of personal travel agency networks.
Activity (active)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 months (March to September). • Seasonal cultural calendar with carnivals and festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not defined
Online access (visibility)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated agritourism website (nationally or regionally) • Good rating on popular websites, blogs and social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No exclusive agritourism websites or information portal (locally or nationally) • There are only private accounts with online access (e.g., Facebook, Instagram etc.)
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities, Regional Governance and the Consortium play an active role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Marketing (Word of mouth/mouse) • Good use of social media, TV documentaries and TV news editions.

9. Agritourism models in selected municipalities

In this chapter, the agritourism models of the selected three municipalities are summarized. The detailed analysis about the municipalities can be found in the annexes.

9.1 Belsh Profile (detailed analysis in Annex I)

Image of agritourism in Belsh; Main stakeholders of agritourism in Belsh have described the image of agritourism as follows;

“Enjoy the rich taste of every-season products cooked according to Central Albania cuisine, seasoned with olive oil, served by the beautiful lakes under the fresh and unpolluted air”.

Advantages:

- The area is rich in rural amenities, traditional cuisine.
- Belsh areas is unique with its 84 karst lakes.
- This area has beautiful landscapes with hills and vineyards, hospitality, fresh and seasonal products, and a good infrastructure.

Challenges:

- Lack of agritourism farms officially recognized as such, and 3 units (guest house, restaurants, farms) have the potential to be officially recognized as agritourism.
- Lack of marketing about the attractions of the area.
- Lack of cooperation between stakeholders who are involved in the agritourism development.

- The food safety standards are not fully absorbed by farmers and other related stakeholders.
- Fragmented and small units that may be transformed into agritourism (e.g., farms).

Belshi agritourism is strongly linked with agricultural products being fresh, processed or cooked and served at restaurants. It is mainly based on daily tourists, and not necessary linked with accommodation facilities.

Agritourism typology in Belsh area

Due to its richness in natural sights (i.e., lakes), gastronomy and intensive agricultural production, this area has a great potential for agritourism development. However, the most agritourism typologies that were spread in this area were those that belong to typology 1, 2 (see Figure 1). So there were cases there of agritourism in a non-working farm where the housing place was previously a farm dedicated to rural activities but presently are not connected with the farming component. For example, there was a restaurant which used to buy local products (e.g., Zejtaria agritourism) but did not have a farm to produce agricultural products. However, there were other cases where agritourism was operating as a working farm but with passive tourists' contact. For example, Agritourism Paja is a farm with a restaurant

but a passive contact of visitors in terms of farm activities.

Although there was a great potential for agritourism development, in this region there is no certified agritourism entity. Finally, for this area, in the short and mid-term we suggest to foster the model of agritourism that belongs to the typologies 2, 3, and 4 (see Figure 1).

9.2 Korça profile (detailed analysis in Annex II)

Image of agritourism; Main stakeholders of agritourism in Korca have described the image of agritourism as follows:

“Enjoy delicious food of very rich local cuisine, prepared by tireless housewives, accompanied by delicious wines and mulberry brandy, closed up with multiflowered honey, under the joy-able and melancholic guitar sounds”

Advantages:

- Korça district has a diverse tourism offer such as ecotourism, urban tourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism and agritourism.
- This district is very rich in traditional cuisine, beautiful landscapes, many cultural attractions, mainly in rural areas, several villages with experience in B&B and hospitality etc.
- There are several massive events organized along the year, which attracts a huge number of visitors.
- In Korca district there are two officially recognized agritourism facilities.

Challenges:

- Only two agritourism facilities are officially recognized, and up to three has the potential to become a certified for agritourism.
- Limited accommodation capacity in rural areas.
- Lack of Info-points.
- Limited trainings for the the agritourism operators and its staff.
- Weak collaboration (i.e., lack of exchanging experience, information, customer references etc) between stakeholders related to the agritourism development.
- Staff that offer tourist hospitality services are not trained.

Korca agritourism is mainly focusing on food sector, with processed and especially cooked products. Agritourism in Korca mainly combines cultural tourism with agritourism and includes B&B accommodation.

Agritourism typology in Korça region

Korça is one of the most visited region in terms of nature based-tourism, because it is rich in natural attractions (e.g., Voskopoja, Dardha, lake of Pogradec etc.), and has diverse gastronomy. However, agritourism development is still in its infancy, the agritourism in this region is well advanced compared to the Belsh area. Generally speaking, all five typologies can be found in this region. Thus, there are agritourism in non-working farms providing accommodation, and ensuring agricultural products from other local farms (cases in Dardha and Voskopoja villages). In this way, there is no direct connection with farms and even less participation of the visitors into the farms' activities. However,

there are two agritourism farms formally certified as such (i.e., Farma Sotira and Taverna Xhufka). These two agritourism provide simultaneously three components (accommodation, food and beverage services, and recreational activities) and represents the fifth typology. Agritourims that belongs to the typologies 2, 3 and 4 are emerging. For example, there are Luadhi Celos¹⁶ pogradec, Ferma Xharshe¹⁷, Max winery¹⁸, Sofra Kolonjare etc., who has a great potential to be recognized formally as agritourism entities.

We suggest to foster the model of Farma Sotira agritourism¹⁹ in this region. Finally, for this area, in the short and mid-term we suggest to foster the model of agritourism that belongs to the typologies 2, 3, 4, and 5.

9.3 Malësa e Madhe profile (detailed analysis in Annex III)

Main stakeholders of agritourism in Malësi e Madhe have described the image of agritourism as follows:

“The taste of pristine tradition of Albanian alps, accompanied with clean mountain waters under the breeze of beech forests and the sound of bells of sheep grazing on rich mountain pastures”.

Advantages:

- Malësi e Madhe district is the richest area in beautiful and high mountains, and breath-taking landscapes.
- This area provides alternative tourism opportunities, as ecotourism, agritourism and other forms of tourism.

- Rich in traditional cuisine and fresh local products.
- Highest density of guesthouses in Albania.
- Availability of handmade products.
- Great potential for agritourism (11 rural units has potential to be transformed into certified agritourism facilities).

Challenges:

- Limited intensive agricultural production.
- Lack of maintenance of the roads and tourist trails.
- Not all touristic attractions are identified and promoted.
- Lacking local and regional government support for agritourism development and promotion of the local attractions.
- Lack of basic services such lack of drinking water, electricity in the farms.
- Low quality services.
- Lack of specialized and trained staff.
- Cooperation is spontaneous informal and not contract-based.
- There is no agritourism farm officially recognized in this area.

Agritourism in Malësi e Madhe is mainly based in local products and food. The traditional way of doing agriculture, working with plants and animals is one of dominant attraction elements. Agritourism is strongly linked with nature and ecotourism, both requiring accommodation facilities, preferably B&B.

16. <https://agroturizem.gov.al/luadhi-i-celos-agritourism/>

17. <https://agrotourism.gov.al/xharshe-hostel-farm/>

18. <https://agrotourism.gov.al/max-winery/>

19. Farma Sotira is officially registered as Agritourism. It offers recreational activities, accommodation, and food and beverage services. <https://agrotourism.gov.al/farma-sotira-leskovik-kolonja/>

Agritourism typology in Malësi e Madhe region

As described above, Malësi e Madhe region is the richest area about beautiful and high mountains, traditional cuisine, fresh local products, and highest density of guesthouses in Albania. Thus, this area has also a great potential for agritourism development. On this area, agritourism types mostly belongs to the typologies 1, 2, 3 and 4. In this region there are no certified agritourism farms however, several successful cases are emerging. For example, there are Kantina e Miqesise,

Rruga e Mullirit²⁰ and Shporta e Reçit²¹. These agritourism entities have a great potential to be certified formally in the near future.

In this area, in the short and mid-term we suggest to foster the model of agritourism that belongs to the typologies 2, 3 and 4.

20. <https://agrotourism.gov.al/the-mills-path-rruga-e-mullirit/>

21. <https://agrotourism.gov.al/recis-basket-shporta-e-recit/>

10. Conclusions

The purpose of this position paper is to examine the current situation of the agritourism development. To achieve this goal, four main objectives are developed and addressed (1) to examine the current situation and potentials of the agritourism development; (2) to define agritourism concept, and furthermore, to describe the agritourism typologies, in Albanian context; (3) to identify and describe the stakeholders and their role on agritourism development; and (4) to describe the past, current policy interventions and propose future interventions.

First; Albania is a suitable destination for agritourism development due to its richness in natural and agricultural resources. In addition, agriculture and tourism are two significant sectors for socio-economic development. Therefore, strategies that bring into the practice development paths that interlink these two significant sectors, are indisputable. In sum, agritourism is a tool that could foster sustainable rural development in Albania. Although agritourism is an already known phenomena all over Albania and has a potential for development, it is still in its infancy.

Second; there is a confusion about using interchangeably the concepts of agritourism and rural tourism. While rural tourism is strictly dedicated to tourism products, services and activities that are related to the local areas and inhabitants, the agritourism adds the farming component to the tourism services and facilities, the tourists being involved in the basic activities of the rural accommodation unit (e.g., growing vegetables, food processing,

animal care). However, to better define and practically absorb the agritourism concept, even in the context of Albania, we strongly suggest to consider five typologies of the agritourism farms proposed by Phillip et al. (2010).

Third; stakeholders that are directly related to the agritourism development, and are currently playing an active role are as follows; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Academia, Donors and NGOs (FAO, GIZ, USAID), customers, local governments, tourism agencies, local farmers. Some of the stakeholders that are directly and indirectly related to the agritourism development, and are currently playing an inactive role are the National Agency for Territory Planning (NATP), extension service (both local and regional level), National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT).

Fourth; agritourism lately has gained the policy-makers attention because it is considered a catalyst for rural development, particularly in agricultural areas that have experienced declines. Agritourism in Albania is considered as a diversifying strategy for farm activities that foster rural development, and as a result, there is a need for more interventions by policy-makers. Recently, there are several initiatives that are focused on rural development, and more specifically, agritourism development, reflecting a significant prioritization at the national policy-making level. These policy-making initiatives were conducted in terms of (1) regulation (i.e., Ministerial council decision-MCD, which addresses the procedure of registering as agritourism and

other issues); (2) taxation or fiscal issues through reducing the VAT and income tax; and (3) financial schemes (grants).

Fifth, along the interviews with agripreneurs, it was noticed that agritourism has revitalized and promote local products and traditional dishes. For example, in Belsh (Paja Agritourism), has planted some organic and local products. Another case in Lezha (Mrizi i Zanave agritourism) has revitalized several dishes that are closely related to the traditions of the local area. These products and dishes are sold at restaurants and or directly sold to the visitors. In fact, traditional dishes and/or local products represent the major reason to visit these agritourism farms.

Sixth, cooperation is a challenge to be addressed in all three regions. Some features of cooperation in these areas are: spontaneous, not regular and not contract based. An informal level of cooperation is identified between, farms, restaurants local government and tourist agencies. There is a model of cooperation between restaurants, guesthouses, and local farmers promoted by USAID (the case of Seferan). It seems that farmers, entrepreneurs of restaurants, representatives of municipalities do not have necessary knowledge about cooperation opportunities, concepts of networks and contracting. There are only two cases (i.e., Korça region) certified as agritourism entities in all three target areas and the concept of agritourism and knowledge about how it operates are not well understood among the stakeholders who are related to the agritourism development.

11. Recommendations

After analyzing the feedback from stakeholders at three target areas (Korça, Belsh, Malesi e Madhe), examining the existing documents and strategies about agritourism in Albania, a deep review of the current academic literature, and benchmarking with other international models of agritourism development, the paper suggests the following interventions. These interventions are suggested to be undertaken by both national and local stakeholders²²:

Although there is a confusion on the **definition of agritourism**, to avoid its use interchangeably with rural tourism, agritourism should be considered by policymakers and other related stakeholders, as a particular form of new sustainable way of doing and diversifying agriculture, and as a result, to develop the rural areas. In addition, supporting agritourism development is very important due its multiple effects on rural areas. Thus, agritourism spans over a variety of sectors (agriculture, accommodation and food services and recreation, transport, tourism operator/agencies, wholesale trade, retail trade).

It is necessary to undertake a **study at national level** in order to better examine the agritourism development. This study will provide a clearer picture about agritourism phenomena, its role and challenges (i.e., the current situation of agritourism in terms of legal framework, financing of the sector, fiscal issues, typologies of agritourism etc.), and future recommended interventions. This study should be undertaken by central

Government (i.e., MARD), even by the donors support. This initiative will provide a more in-depth explanation of the socio-economic-cultural effects of agritourism on rural communities' development.

There is a need to compile a **national strategy on agritourism development** in Albania. This strategy would help to gain agreement on its definition, what opportunities it offers and what could be done to enhance its development. More specifically, this strategy will serve as a framework for future interventions to sustainably develop this sector through implementing policies in terms on capacity building, fiscal, financial and legal issues.

It is suggested that policy-makers consider the need for a better regulation framework through **adjusting the MCD** that already exist, and furthermore, considering the option of a law dedicated to agritourism which reflects the concerns that several farmers are facing with, and which has potential for agritourism. A very important adjustment at the regulation framework, is to re-consider the strict conditions foreseen at the MCD about certifying agritourism. According to the definition of agritourism, accommodation is not a precondition. However, the MCD has foreseen that an agritourism should provide accommodation. This exclude several types of agritourism entities which do not include accommodation as part of their offer, but provide other elements as direct selling, agricultural activities, education activities, use and preservation of local varieties, and other income generation activities for the

22. To identify the national and local stakeholders, please refer to the section 8.

farms. So, interventions to the MCD are considered necessary for promoting and supporting activities that diversify farmers' income.

To better reflect the reality of agritourism development at the legal framework, we strongly suggest the five typologies proposed by Philip et al. (2010). These **typologies of agritourism** would be a good start to reflect the real potential of agritourism development in Albania. Although, Phillip et al. (2010) have proposed five typologies. Most spread agritourism typologies on the three target regions are typology 1, 2, 3. Although the typology 1 is well spread in three regions and in Albania in general, we do not suggest to be considered at the regulation framework as an agritourism. This typology does not consider the working farm as a core component of doing agritourism. Additionally, this typology is classified by scholars as one of the most controversy typology and is closer related to the rural tourism than agritourism. As regard to the typologies 2, 3, 4 and 5 they should be the reflected at the legal framework as a reference for future agritourism development.

As regard to the benchmarking perspective, the current model of the agritourism development in Albania (considering those formally registered), is more close to the Tuscany model (Italy), then those of the region (Balkan countries). Even the regulation framework, it is closest to the Tuscany model. In this vein, we suggest to consider the Italian model of agritourism development, but with necessary adjustments. This is the best way to make a clear distinction about which of the Ministries of the central Government should take the leading role over this sector.

We strongly suggest to the Ministry of

Agriculture and Rural Development to take the lead of the agripreuners initiative about their cooperation. Reconsidering again the Tuscany model, one of the most representative of its dimension, is the level of network development. Thus, there are the so called "Strada del vino" or wine routes, who facilitate the innovation in terms marketing, reduce the costs, urge for an effective value chain etc. Joint marketing is a focal point of these networks and agritourism play a crucial role. More specifically, a "national agritourism association" could facilitate future agritourism development. This association would be a great opportunity as a first step of establishing networks among agritourism operators and other stakeholders. Women agripreuners would play a significant role on this suggested network. This is due to that scholars have argued that women are perceived to be particularly well suited to agritourism due to their traditional role on the family farm. Additionally, they are perceived to have more specialized competencies on cleaning, cooking, and care work which are part of the core activities into the daily management of agritourism. Therefore, promoting networking based on women leaders would be a facilitating aspect of cooperation in this sector.

There is a need for a **campaign at national level**, in order to raise awareness of local rural communities, farmers, local government and NGOs about agritourism. For example, along the workshops organized at Malesi e Madhe, Korça, and Belsh, it was obvious that certain local farmers were not cooperating with local agritourism, guesthouses and restaurants etc., of those areas. This is important because current MCD has foreseen that at least 30% of products and food provided by agritourism must be produced at the

farm, and the rest (70%) should be from other local producers. Campaigns such as periodic fairs based on local products should be organized at national and regional level to promote the role of agritourism and the cooperation among different stakeholders. A good example of this fairs and events with local products, is the municipality of Korça, which organizes several local events (Beer Fest, Raki of Boboshtica etc.), which in turn, has influenced the increasing numbers of visitors in the area.

Intervention for **capacity building about agritourism** services is necessary at the national level. This intervention might be through intensive trainings to the staff of those operating agritourism farms (e.g. farmers), and furthermore, determining as a preliminary obligation to those who intend to establish an agritourism facility. For example, it is important to raise awareness and train agripreneurs about visitors' health (e.g., food safety) related to their consumption of food products at the farm and close contact with the animals. The role of extension services in advising and transferring knowledge on agritourism development is currently ineffective. This is due to the lack of their knowledge about this new phenomenon. Thus, there is a need for updating the knowledge of extension services in several aspects related to agritourism development (e.g., agritourism typologies, agritourism importance for rural areas development, its effects on farm income, market trends etc.). Additionally, agritourism farms are suffering from the lack of qualified workers. Academia (i.e., vocational schools and universities) might play a significant role in this through offering study programs and/or courses more closely related to the agritourism management, gastronomy etc. There is a need for a close cooperation between the academia and agritourism farms. Although

at Agriculture University of Tirana (AUT) there is a department named "Rural tourism management" where graduated students are equipped with the knowledge and skills related to the agritourism management, there is lack close cooperation with the market. To this, a starting point might be signing a Memorandum of understanding between AUT and agritourism entities.

To guarantee the quality of food and the service to tourists, quality standards schemes, and management system oriented to standards has to be addressed during training and development both for owners and employees operating agritourism facilities. The common activities and facilities for different agritourism centers should meet the quality and safety of: attributes of food and farm products with plant and animal origin; crop protection and possibly using organic farming techniques and protocols; geographic and nominated protected origin of quality agricultural products and foodstuffs; food free from hazards. Also the hygienic conditions of premises and farms, authentic food; simple food traceability systems from farm to final destination, maintaining log book, feedback from visitors, set procedure for welcome of customers should be well maintained. Trainings on these topics certainly would make the personnel more competent, knowledgeable and able to answer questions from customers and contribute to their competitiveness also with an impact on business development and environment.

We suggest to **design a database** about agritourism, due to the lack of official data about agritourism phenomena at the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). This database will serve as a significant source for future interventions in terms of policymaking.

In order to address the above interventions, we strongly suggest to MARD to have a **structure within the MARD, dedicated for agritourism** development. This suggestion, is justified based on several reasons. First, agritourism development in Albania is experiencing a fast growing. Within two years (from 2018) 23 farms became certified as such. Additionally, there is a legal framework about agritourism. Second, as indicated at the above section, this phenomena plays significant role in diversifying farm activities which in turn, foster the rural development. Third, this new phenomenon in Albania, is fostering the contact of urban residents toward rural areas. Finally, this new activity is considered as a good opportunity for farmers to enhance their economic performance. With a structure within the MARD, agritourism entities would have a partner in the Government structure, which could better direct them towards growth.

Considering the feedback from three cases investigated (i.e., Korça, Malësi e Madhe, Belsh), there is an immediate **need for intervention in terms of the infrastructure** (e.g., electricity and water). Another immediate intervention is about land ownership documentation. For example, Malesi e Madhe case is in emergence situation about this issue. Special attention is needed by local governments on waste management of agritourism farms, in order to avoid environmental problems and pollution because of tourist activities.

Neglecting behavior, confusion and lack of information was observed by farmers and other stakeholders who aim to invest in agritourism. So we suggest that **local governments and extension services should take a more active role**, by informing directly those potential agrioturism farms and address

the obstacles they deal with. Farmers interested in agritourism are unaware of the types of products and activities they could provide, and how they could adapt their farm to provide an authentic and competitive opportunity for agritourism. Local governments should establish a central information point of visitors about agritourism and other local touristic attractions, organize massive events that attract visitors into the area, maintain other touristic sites, promote the area and agritourism at national and international level, present agritourism at national and international fairs and exhibitions, design a central website of all agritourism in the area, to lead and/or foster networking among agritourism and other stakeholders of the value chain etc. Seeking the technical and financial support of international donors is fundamental in this process.

Reflection on COVID-19

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have highly affected agritourism activities because of travel restrictions, new hygiene and health regulations and restrictions, changes in demand and supply for agricultural products, changes in the value chains etc. It is recommended to provide capacity building and technical assistance to farmers in order to facilitate introduction and support for new practices in agritourism, as follows:

- Online ordering and home delivery;
- Door to door sales;
- Moving farmers shops;
- In farm pick-up yourself or shop in the garden practices;
- Community supported agriculture;
- Box System and basket communities.

It is recommended to organize trainings (hygiene, sales, labeling) and consultancy events for agritourism farms in the work frame of the National Program for Rural Development. It is also recommended to introduce Government supporting schemes, small grants to support farmers and agritourism entities with small-scale investment support, for example: refrigerated car, cars with refrigerated counter, mobile lavatories, hygiene products, labeling software, order management software, marketing tools, etc.

12. References

- Arroyo, C. G., Barbieri, C., and Rich, S. R. (2013). Defining agritourism: A comparative study of stakeholders' perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina. *Tourism Management*, 37, 39-47.
- Barbieri, C. (2010). An importance-performance analysis of the motivations behind agritourism and other farm enterprise developments in Canada. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 5(1, 2), 1-20.
- Barbieri, C., and Mshenga, P. M. (2008). The role of the firm and the owner characteristics on the performance of agritourism farms. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 48(2), 166-182.
- Barbieri, C., and Valdivia, C. (2010). Recreation and agroforestry: examining new dimensions of multifunctionality in family farms. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26(4), 465-473.
- Bhatta, K. (2019). Prospects of Multifunctionality in Nepalese Agriculture: The Agritourism Perspectives. *Journal of Tourism and Adventure*, 2(1), 108-118.
- Bock, B. (2004) Fitting in and multi-tasking: Dutch farm women's strategies in rural entrepreneurship. *Sociologia Ruralis* 44 (3) pp. 245-260
- Darque, M. B. (1988) The division of labor and decision-making in farming couples: power and negotiation. *Sociologia Ruralis* 28 (4) pp. 272-292.
- Domi, S. (2014). The potential advantages and disadvantages of contract farming. *Horizons International scientific journal* (12). 89-92.
- Domi, S., Belletti, G., Domi, F. (2019). Sustainable rural development through agritourism: the role of origin products and networking. Unpublished manuscript. Post-Doctoral research at University of Florence. Florence. Italy.
- Domi, S., & Capelleras, J. L. (2016). Individual and joint effects of innovation, customer orientation and human resources practices on the performance of Albanian tourism SMEs (Doctoral dissertation, PhD Thesis. University of St. Kliment Ohridski. Bitola: North Macedoni. Available at: http://www.eccfp.edu.mk/files/PostgraduateUpload/PhD_Thesis_ShpresimDomi_Tourism_SMEs_performance.pdf)
- Domi, S., Capelleras, J. L., and Musabelliu, B. (2020). Customer orientation and SME performance in Albania: A case study of the mediating role of innovativeness and innovation behavior. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 26(1), 130-146.
- Esposti, R., 2012. Knowledge, technology and innovations for a bio-based economy: lessons from the past, challenges for the future. *Bio-based Appl. Econ.* 1 (3), 231-264
- Galluzzo, N. I. C. O. L. A. (2017). The impact of the common agricultural policy on the agritourism growth in

- Italy. *Bulgarian Journal of Agricultural Science*, 23(5), 698-703.
- Giraud, C. and J. Rémy (2013) Division conjugale du travail et légitimité 920 professionnelle : le cas des activités de diversification en France. *Travail, 921 Genre et Société* 30 pp. 157-174.
 - Grgić, I., Zrakić, M., Velaga-Gudelj, A. (2015). Agrotourism in Croatia and some EU countries.
 - INSTAT (2017). VJETARI STATISTIKOR 2017. INSTAT. Tirane.
 - INSTAT (2018). Vjetari statistikor. INSTAT. Tirane.
 - Little, J. and O. Jones (2000) Masculinity, gender and rural policy. *Rural Sociology* 65 (4) pp. 621-639
 - 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.
 - Maetzold, J. A. (2002). "Nature-based Tourism and agritourism trends: Unlimited opportunities." Accessed on November 22, 2018 at www.kerrcenter.com/publications/2002_proceedings/agritourism.pdf.
 - MARD (2018). Strategjia kombëtare për zhvillimin e qëndrueshëm të turizmit 2018 – 2022. MARD. Tirana
 - MTE (2018). Strategjia kombëtare për zhvillimin e qëndrueshëm të turizmit 2018 – 2022. Ministria e Turizmit dhe Mjedisit. Tirane.
 - Jones, E., Haven, C. (2005). Tourism SMEs, service quality, and destination competitiveness. CABI.
 - Phillip, S., C. Hunter, and K. Blackstock. (2010). "A Typology for Defining Agritourism." *Tourism Management*, 31 (6): 754-58.
 - Petrović, M. D., Radović, G., and Terzić, A. (2015). An Overview of Agritourism Development in Serbia and European Union Countries. *International Journal of Sustainable Economies Management (IJSEM)*, 4(2), 1-14.
 - Randelli, F., Romei, P. and Tortora, M. (2014). An evolutionary approach to the study of rural tourism: The case of Tuscany. *Land Use Policy*, 38, 276-281.
 - Schilling, B.J.; Sullivan, K.P. (2014) Characteristics of New Jersey agritourism farms. *Journal of Food Distribution Research* 45, 161-173
 - Sharpley, R., Vass, A. (2006) Tourism, farming, and, diversification: an attitudinal study. *Tourism management*, 27, pp. 10401052.
 - Statistical Office of Montenegro-MONSTAT (2011): Agricultural census 2010 structure of agricultural holdings, Used land, Podgorica, Montenegro.
 - Tarolli, P., Preti, F., Romano, N. (2014). Terraced landscapes: from an old best practice to a potential hazard for soil degradation due to land abandonment. *Anthropocene* 6, 10-25.

- The Parliament of Romania Tourism Law (2017). Available online: http://www.mdrl.ro/_documente/transparenta/consultari_publice/consultare135/lege_turism.pdf (accessed on 11 November, 2020).
- Vandecandelaere, E., Arfini, F., Belletti, G., Marescotti, A., Allaire, G., Cadilhon, J. J., ... & Jull, C. (2009). Linking people, places and products. A guide for promoting quality linked to geographical origin and sustainable geographical indications. FAO.
- WTTC (2018). Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2018 Albania. WTTC. London, United Kingdom.
- Wright, W., & Annes, A. (2014). Farm women and agritourism: Representing a new rurality. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 54(4), 477-499.
- UNWTO (2017). Gastronomy Tourism. Madrid, Retrieved May 21, 2020. https://affiliatemembers.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/gastronomy_report_web.pdf

13. Annexes

Annex I. Profile for Agritourism in Belsh

Belsh is a municipality in Elbasan County in central Albania. The municipality was formed at the 2015 local government reform by the merger of the former municipalities Belsh, Fierzë, Grekan, Kajan and Rrasë with 34 villages. It has a population of 33,632 and total surface area of 187 km² with a population density of 104 people/km². The administrative center of the municipality is the town Belsh. The municipality is characterized by the large plateau “Dumreja” spanning over an area of 21.500 ha. The municipality is known for its 85 karst lakes created due to sinkholes covering an area of 640 ha, which is part of the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System of the Balkan Peninsula being one of the major contributors of freshwater entering the Adriatic Sea.²³

Agriculture is the main source of income for the rural population. The agricultural production is characterized by small subsistence-oriented family farms, which use the lakes for irrigation, mostly uncontrolled. Before the communist regime, the small hills were covered with forests and woods but were cleared and used for agricultural purposes. Farmers in Dumreja have been the first in Albania to start growing saffron as a niche production in medical and aromatic plants (MAP)/ herb production. However, the high-quality groundwater, which is essential for healthy drinking water in the region and for the sustainability of rich freshwater ecosystems

and coastal habitats, is threatened through un-controlled irrigation, consumption and inflowing sewage.

Besides the recreational value of the lakes, Belsh has archaeological and historical values for tourism development such as at Seferan Lake the Sanctuary of the Venus (Aferdita in Albania). People used to throw terracotta vases and pottery in the lake in honor to the goddess. Nowadays, those terracotta gifts are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Tirana. Aferdita Fest is an annual event held on 10th of May. Improvement of road infrastructure from Elbasan and to Berat can further boost Belsh as a tourist and recreational area included in a one-day trip from Tirana.

Olives are the main agricultural product in Belsh covering more than 900 ha. Olives are processed in small oil mills for the households' own needs and partly sold directly by the farmers to customers. Vineyards are also important for the areas covering 361 ha (Operative data from MARD). Traditionally produced wine is sold on the local markets or in towns nearby (Cerrik, or Elbasan). Local grape varieties such as Sheshi Zi and Sheshi Bardhe are dominant but recently some farmers have started to plant Merlot Cabernet. Fruit trees are grown by the family for their own consumption: plums, cherries, quince, figs, citrus, pears, apricots, pomegranates etc. The area is not competitive to grow vegetables for the markets, most of the farmers are obliged to sell the products at low prices to intermediate traders.

23. TCPF: Initial support to development of smallholders TCP/ALB/3701/C1, Feasibility study on agricultural smallholders and rural development in the four Municipalities in Albania: Belsh, Korce, Malesi e Madhe and Vlora – Economic, social and environmental potentials and challenges. Budapest, June 2019

Livestock is present at almost all families and mainly used for self-consumption (two or more cows) with the total number of cows in the municipality is about 3,974 heads. There are also 10,500 sheep and 2213 goats. In addition, there are about 2,515 beehives in the region and around 50.1 ha planted with oregano and a trial for growing *Helichrisum Italicum* is on a surface of 5 ha in Gjolen village (Operative data from MARD).

Tobacco has been an important crop in Belsh municipality during communist time. After the 1990's the old markets were lost, and its production decreased rapidly. There are 113 ha of tobacco. Several efforts have been made by the private sector to stimulate and re-start tobacco production, but due to the collectors' speculation practices, the price fluctuations of tobacco led to overproduction, so prices fell, and farmers lost money.

Aquaculture is another specific activity in Belsh. As far as Belsh has more than 80 natural lakes, this resource is used by some people which have taken fishing concessions for a period of 10 years. They populate lakes with fish of species as Bighead carp and Grass carp. The fish caught there is sold mainly to local market. Fishing and trout harvesting are sources of income for local people.

Created due to sinkholes covering an area of 640 ha, the municipality is known for its 84 karst lakes as a recreational attraction in the proximity of the cities Tirana and Elbasan. The new, recently completed Tirana/Elbasan road to Berat provides the opportunity for tourists to make a stopover on their way to the tourist highlight Berat. Only recently there have been some initiatives for developing some touristic activities mainly at Belsh centre (such as the reconstruction of the lakefront promenade)

supported by the Government of Albania (GoA). The GoA included Seferan village in the "100 village" programme to promote economic and social development. USAID and the Embassy of Sweden in Albania are supporting the Seferan village through the Tourism Investment and Finance Fund (TIFF) to invest in small pilot agrotourism, ecotourism enterprises or water tourism activities (rural pension, restaurant, marketing of local products such as olive oil). Apart from being the source of water for irrigation and for aquaculture, the lakes are not used for sportive fishing, or other sport and recreational activities. It is obvious, and confirmed by the mayor of Belsh, that the pilot investments have not been based on a broader, inclusive touristic concept for the area. Only a few farmers have been linked with these businesses until now, offering some local products to the USAID-supported restaurant, e.g. fresh products, olive oil or fish, which also serves as selling point for some home-made products of few farmers. These products are still processed in a traditional way, i.e. also without control or the implementation of food safety standards. The labelling and marketing need to be improved and to better connect with the territory that is tradition or local characteristics of the food.

Agriculture in Belsh

Because of mild climate in Belsh are grown a large variety of agricultural products as almost all vegetables grown in Albania, produced in open environment or in protected environments/greenhouses. In Belsh are grown all Mediterranean fruits, but also olives. Belsh is known for its tradition in producing tobacco, but also for recently introduced plants as Safron. Belsh area is known also for production of several spicy herbs.

Belsh is known for production of Stapan Cheese (a semi hard cheese), but also for the rich cuisine of middle Albania. Some of typical dishes are: Pie with eggs and milk; Oshmar-dish made with maize flour, Stapan cheese and butter; Trazanik-a type of thin bread with cabbage, etc.

Development of tourism and especially agritourism in Belsh should be based on local tourist attractions. Main attractions for Belsh are:

Main Cultural attractions:

- Gradishta castle in Belsh
- Antique ruins in Pellaz of Urucaj
- Tumuli in west of Kajan
- Church on Belsh source
- Newly discovered object in Rrase
- Food festival on 3rd of February
- Summer day on 14th of March
- Aphrodite fest 10th of May
- Folk festival "Dumrea Lakes" 22-24th of August
- Nymph of lakes 13-15th of September
- As well as several other activities organised by Belsh Municipality

Natural attractions

Some of most known natural attractions in the area are:

- Lake of Belsh, with a surface of 26.8 hectares, and 18 meters deep,
- Lake of Seferan with a surface of 87.5 hectare and 20.8 meters deep,
- Merhoja lake, known for its clear blue water, with a surface of 65.5 hectares and up to 61 meters deep, etc.

- Funnel in Kosova village
- The waterscape is habitat to different species of fish, birds, and plants.

Target groups. Target tourist groups, their age and duration of their stay in Belsh region are:

- Daily visitors from cities close to Belsh as Elbasan and Tirana. Mostly families coming for a lunch and buying local products. Average age of this group is from 30 to 60 (not counting children).
- Short term visitor coming just for purchasing fresh agricultural products.
- Small families visiting the area during weekends with one- or two-night stay, enjoying the landscape, climate, local food etc.
- People coming for business.
- People from abroad visiting their families during holidays.
- Tourists traveling through the country by Campers.
- Hunters and fishermen spending the day in Belsh

Image of agriturism in Belsh

Stakeholders of agritourism have discussed on Belsh attractions, and potential tourist market and based on main pillars have formulated the Image of agritourism in Belsh.

Main Pillars for defining the Image of agritourism in Belsh are:

- Large variety of food products which enrich the agritourist offer
- Rich cuisine of Central Albania

- 84 beautiful lakes
- Good quality olive oil.

Defining the image tourism in Belsh:

“Enjoy the rich taste of every-season products, cooked according to Central Albania cuisine, seasoned with olive oil, served by the beautiful lakes under the fresh and unpolluted air”

Problems for developing agritourism.

There are several problems related agritourism in Belsh. These problems regards: Tourist attractions, tourist marketing, tourist attraction and hospitality.

Problems of Tourist attraction are as follows:

- Some typical local products are not promoted enough (e.g. olives, cheese, tea, fish, honey, etc.);
- Water related activities in lakes are missing (fishing or boating).
- Some events, activities which are not sufficiently promoted, should be supported with funding.
- There are some products for which various activities can be done for promotion but also for attracting tourists such as: “Summer day”;
- There is a lack of tourist packages to include the attractions of the area.
- Marking of roads and paths in the direction of tourist attractions.
- Tourist guides (guides and interpreters) are missing.
- There is a lack of activities and fairs in some important tourist facilities and attractions;
- There are some tourist facilities which are not included so far as tourist attractions, such as “Gradisht mountain” or “ Vasha Source “ that should be included in tourist guides;
- Some workshops for processing products such as olive oil, wineries or processing of medicinal plants may be included in the list of agritourism activities;

Problems related to the marketing of tourism:

- There is no tourist information center in the municipality
- There is no proper tourist guide (as a printed document). There should be more leaflets, brochures, TV advertisements, tourist maps of tourist facilities in the area;
- Culinary needs to be promoted as very little has been done so far. There are no catalogues and posters with recipes for local products; There are no written and standardized recipes for preparing local dishes for tourists;
- There is no online information and promotion for businesses in the field of tourism and agro-tourism;
- There is no tradition in promoting tourism. There is no promotion through TV advertisements or in other media of tourism development in the area;
- There is no museum, which presents the history or the special objects of the area.

Concerns related to the tourism infrastructure:

- Lack of connecting infrastructure between lakes;
- There is a significant lack of accommodation capacity;
- Existing accommodation facilities are not well equipped and do not meet basic tourism criteria;
- Waste management is a problem - the network of bins should be better spread in the territory;
- Tourist signs including roads and paths are not at the right level;
- Some other services related to sports, children's playground, tourist shops, sailing boats, or even bicycles are missing;
- There are no bicycle lanes or boating infrastructure.

Problems related to the hospitality:

- Lack of best practices regarding hospitality.
- The level of services related to accommodation and food is poor;
- The diversity of dishes offered is much lower than the regional tradition;
- Problems with food safety and product quality;
- Communication in foreign languages with foreign tourists is a problem.

Capacity development/training needs:

- Training on food safety and quality standards of products and services;

- Trainings on aspects of hospitality;
- Training regarding the diversification of products that can be used in services in restaurants and B&B;
- Training on cooking in general, but especially local recipes for tourists;
- Trainings for the preparation of tourist guides;
- Trainings for communication in foreign languages.

Cooperation among stakeholders related to the agritourism development

- Cooperation is spontaneous, irregular and not contract-based.
- An informal level of cooperation is established between farms, restaurants, local government, tourism agencies.
- There is a pattern of fostering collaboration between a restaurant, guesthouse, and area farmers (Case of Seferan). This cooperation is promoted and funded by USAID.
- It is noticed that farmers, restaurant entrepreneurs, representatives of the municipality, do not have enough knowledge about the possibilities of cooperation, network concept, contracting.
- There is a lack of certified agritourism in this area.
- The concept of agritourism is not yet fully understood.

Table 3. Stakeholders and/or factors that play a motivating or hindering role in cooperation

Stakeholders/factors	Their motivating role	Their hindering role
Travel Agencies	Provide incentives for cooperation: Bring groups of visitors to the area	Impose low prices of tourist services.
Local government (municipality) and central government	Infrastructural investments; Creating massive events and happenings which attract visitors; Promotion of the area	Lack of fiscal facilities; Construction permits; Enabling environment for tourist businesses is lacking
Local products	Reason for cooperation (According to farmers, the high quality of the product encourages cooperation)	
Farmers	Possibility to sell products	Lack of trust Lack of an example of a collaboration Lack of a cooperative mentality Lack of leadership
Personal acquaintances	Acquaintances between actors foster trust and consequently opportunities for collaboration	
Donors	Funding and human capacity building	

According to the interviewees, some of the incentives for the need for cooperation between the stakeholders are as follows:

- The need for information exchange
- Exchange of experience
- To increase the tourist offer and to extend the supply (e.g. by offering different kind of products, services and tours)
- To access the market.

Annex II Profile of agritourism in Korça

Korça municipality is located in Korça County, in south-eastern Albania. It was formed at the 2015 local government reform by merging eight former municipalities Drenovë, Korça, Lekas, Mollaj, Qendër Bulgarec, Vithkuq, Voskop and Voskopojë with 62 villages. The administrative center of the municipality is the city Korça being the sixth largest city in Albania. The municipality has a population of 75,994 (2011 census) and a total surface area of 815 km² with 93 people/km². The municipality lays on a plateau with about 850 m altitude, surrounded by the Morava Mountains (up to 2.040m). Korça has a continental Mediterranean climate with high temperature fluctuations. Due to the rain shadow of the coastal mountains, the average annual rainfall is only moderate. Temperatures in Korça generally remain cooler than in the western part of Albania due to the average altitude, but about 2.300 hours of sunshine are measured annually, so temperatures are higher than in north-eastern Albania. The geographical and climatic conditions are favourable for the cultivation of fruit (apples, cherries, plums, etc.), various cereals and vegetables such as potatoes and for livestock farming, which takes place mainly on small family farms.²⁴

Korça city and its surroundings is one of the largest and most important cultural (e.g. architecture, byzantine churches with medieval paintings, carnival, local songs, traditional cooking etc.) and economic centers of Albania. Local industries include the manufacture of knitwear, rugs, textiles, and processing of agricultural products (brewing, flour-milling, sugar-refining, meat

products etc.). Korça city is an attractive base for exploring many tourist points located in the nearby mountain, which are well known for hiking and other outdoor sports. However, the villages lack high-quality accommodation and restaurants to directly attract tourists.

Korça municipality is well known for its tradition in agricultural production. In recent years, agricultural production, even on smaller farms, has become more intensive, new technologies have been used and production has become more market oriented. The main crops produced in the region are fruits, mainly apples with 1248 hectares, but also cherries 222 ha and plums with 2019 ha are important produces. Vegetables production, especially tomatoes in the area has an end season window for selling to the domestic market. Moreover, Korça is the fourth biggest cow milk producer in the country with 89.083 ton (or 9.1% of the total milk production in Albania) and the third of small ruminant milk producer with 21,125 ton (or 12.4% of total country small ruminant milk) (INSTAT, 2017). In addition, these areas are characterized by mountain pastures with a high quality and diversified botanical composition contributing to the production of an outstanding milk.

Most of the farmers do not have Global GAP certification because it is too expensive for them, thus they sell most of their production on domestic and regional markets. There are some initiatives in organic production, but these are often farmers that have been supported and advised in one or the other way through

24. TCPF: Initial support to development of smallholders TCP/ALB/3701/C1, Feasibility study on agricultural smallholders and rural development in the four Municipalities in Albania: Belsh, Korce, Malesi e Madhe and Vlora – Economic, social and environmental potentials and challenges. Budapest, June 2019

international development projects for the production on the international market as the local organic market is very small.

Regarding the dairy production, overall, it is destined for the domestic market. While, the number of cattle and small ruminants has been decreasing (not just in the region but in the whole country) during the past two decades, production of milk has been increasing, confirming an improvement in yields (efficiency), triggered by investments in breeds and better management related to a consolidation trend (in terms of dairy farm size).

In the rural regions in Korca there are two types of family farms: The market-oriented farms in the fruit production sector that have planted new fruit trees (mainly apples) of varieties requested by international markets, as well. They have invested in new, modern small equipment and machineries.

The other type of family farms is based on mixed farming as well as the use natural resources for their income generation activities in least intensive areas where the land is limited but also irrigation is not sufficient to provide opportunities for intensive and competitive agricultural production. Most small farms have also few livestock mainly for self-consumption. Some have diversified in beekeeping, distillation of raki or produce jams, but also these produces are mostly oriented for family use and only a smaller part is sold informally on the market.

During the last years touristic activities have been developed in some villages: Voskopoja, Dardha, Boboshtica and Vithkuqi. These villages are well known for offering the possibility to practice many outdoor activities. The area is also famous

for the Byzantine churches of Vithkuqi and Voskpoja with walls painted by famous medieval Albanian painters. However, most Albanian and international tourists stay in the vibrant city of Korça as basis for exploring the tourist points located in the nearby mountains as well as the nearby largest National Park, the Prespa Lake or the Drenova National Park.

Korça is well-known for its very rich food culture and cooler climate in the summer due to its altitude. The number of local varieties and local foods is very large²⁵. These resources have put Korça region on the top of food tourism in Albania.

The rural touristic activities are not yet linked systematically to the potentials of the agriculture, such as for direct marketing of fresh and/or (simple) processed products. Only some restaurants and hotels in the rural areas are directly connected to farmers and buying their products. Most of the restaurants and pensions/ hotels are not locally owned or managed family activities. The owners are mainly investors who had the financial resources from other activities to invest in touristic businesses with only few of them having limited experience and knowledge in this sector.

Some villages of Korca municipality are included in 100 villages programme: Voskopoja, Drenove/Boboshtica, Dardha, this is considered as an opportunity not only for development of infrastructure through public investments, but also for implementing some pilot models of agritourism.

Tourism attractions:

- Very rich traditional cuisine.
Most typical dishes are: one layer pie made with several different dressings; kolloface-special

25. <http://rasp.org.al/assets/katalogu-i-korces.pdf>

dried sausage; llukanik-sausage; dollma; stuffed spleen; petka-local pastry; pancakes; polenta with pork crackling; dredhanik-pastry sweet; walnut jam; and much more.

- Widespread fruit production which gives possibility for small scale processing.
- Beautiful landscapes, mainly in mountain areas
- Many cultural attractions, mainly in rural areas.
- Several villages with experience in B&B and hospitality

Image of agritourism in Korça region might be defined as follows:

“Enjoy delicious food of very rich local cuisine, prepared by tireless housewives, accompanied by delicious vines and mulberry brandy, closed up with multiflowered honey, under the joy able and melancholic guitar sounds”

Tourism market profile:

- Daily tourists from Korca or from outside Korca. They spend several hours there, and come mostly because of traditional food.
- Tourists who come to buy fresh food (fruits and vegetables as well as processed products (such as typical local pasta, apple cider vinegar, jam, etc.);
- Foreign tourists who are part of tours in North Macedonia or Greece and spend one day in Korca or Pogradec;
- Passers-by who stop for a break or dinner;

- School children, for learning reasons, to get acquainted with the village can see the details in the phase of birth of lambs, lambing, etc;
- Visits to the mountains are preferred by local or transit tourists from outside Korca;
- Ecotourist. Walk nature in Bozdovec, Moker, etc. (not many);
- Health tourism (Dardhe thermal waters). Mainly people above 40 years with a stay from 3 to 15 days.;
- Tourists who prefer horseback riding / horseback riding. It started in Voskopoja but also other areas;
- Tourists (different ages) who come for camping and campling and stay from 2 to 7 days;
- Culture and archeology tourists, with a stay from 2 to 7 days;
- Family tourists who, in addition to food, also require conditions for childrens’ entertainment. Their stay is from one to three days.
- Those who are interested in making professional photos and video clips in nature and agricultural farms (new couples with engagement and marriage occasions).

Problems related to the tourism and/or agritourism

Problems related to the tourism attractions:

- Traditional cooking practices are identified but do not have the proper promotion as for instance “KORANI Dish/pot” etc....

- There is a lack of certification of traditional products in the area, even there are some attempts by NGOs, but still insufficient.
- Some traditional restaurants have weak connection with farmers. They mainly get supplied with agricultural products from the market.
- There are some recreation activities, but they are not enough.

Problems related to the marketing of tourism:

- There is no proper promotion of tourist and cultural values, these activities are based on individual efforts and initiatives.
- There is a lack of coordination between the Municipality, the central government and the farmers.

Problems related to the tourism infrastructure:

- Infrastructure towards tourist attractions (especially cultural values), such as “Church of St. Morena”, “Mosaic of Illyrians”, “Selce Cemetery”, etc. is almost absent.
- There is a lack of information signs and indicative maps to describe the places to visit and the itineraries to be followed.

- Accommodation capacity in rural areas is limited, and requires expansion.
- Shops for tourists are missing. They are present only in Korca and Voskopoja.
- There is not a wide range for provision of services from the B&B and agritourism points, because the latter are focused only on accommodation and restaurants, there is no provision of entertainment and similar services.
- Info-points are missing in most of rural areas. These are present only in Korca, Voskopoja and Prespa.

Problems related to the Hospitality:

- Tourist hospitality is at average level, but is not provided with a standard and high quality according to the requirements.
- The staffs that offer tourist hospitality services are not trained, but offer this service based on to practical knowledge.
- The important point is the lack of financial support with funds, educational, training and practical support for young people towards the development of agritourism.
- Another problem lately is the lack of labor, due to emigration.

Cooperation among stakeholders related to the agritourism

Table 4. Stakeholders and/or factors that have a motivating or hindering role in cooperation

Stakeholders/factors	Their motivating role	Their hindering role
Tourist agencies	Bringing visitors through tour guides	Leading or fully influencing the terms of informal agreements with guesthouses
Local government (municipality) and central government	There is a tourism office in the municipality; Organization of mass events such as beer festival, Boboshtice rakia/brandy, etc. , which encourages visitors, and further cooperation between actors	Lack of vision and a concrete plan to promote cooperation; Lack of funding that promotes cooperation between stakeholders
Local products	According to farmers the quality of products promotes collaboration	
Farmers	There are cases of farmers selling their products on the basis of cooperation agreements (contracts).	Lack of trust; Poor communication between each other; Lack of an example of a collaboration
Personal acquaintances	They can contribute to customer reference	
Donors	Financing and capacity building; Promoting cooperation and networking; Presentation of cooperation models, concepts of cooperation	IPARD requires a lot of documents
Agricultural extensions	Encouraging cooperation by promoting its benefits to increase production, innovation, etc.	Limitedly active; Lack of special knowledge and expertise about recent concepts
Leadership		No farmers, B&B entrepreneurs or others interested to form association between stakeholders of different categories

According to the interviewees, some of the reasons for the need for cooperation between the actors in agritourism are as follows:

- Need for information exchange
- Experience exchange
- To increase offer and access the market

Annex III. Profile for Agritourism in Malësi e Madhe

The region includes parts of the “the cursed mountains” (known in Albanian as Bjeshkët e Nemuna,) and hinterland of the Lake Scutari, with valleys of the Cem river.

Historically Malësia e Madhe (great highlands) contained five large tribes with four (Hoti, Kelmendi, Shkreli, Kastrati) having a Catholic majority and Muslim minority with Gruda evenly split between both religions²⁶.

Due to its rich culture, the highland region has attracted more attention from anthropologists, artists, writers and scholars than any other Albanian-populated region. It is Malësia that produced what has been considered the national epic of the Albanian people, *Lahuta e Malcís* (The Highland Lute) Author and Franciscan friar Gjergj Fishta spent 35 years composing this epic poem, in which is chronicled the whole range of the ethnic Albainan cultural experience (e.g. weddings, funerals, historical battles, mythology, genealogy, and tribal law). It is as interesting to modern readers as an anthropological document as it is a magnificent poem.

Because of its mainly mountain terrain, agriculture is less developed compared with lowlands. Only western part of the district has arable land mainly for MAPS and vineyards. Larger part of the district is mountain and hilly areas where main production is related to livestock. Sheep and goats, and in a lesser extend cows use natural pastures during most of the year. Most of farms are not market oriented and mostly produce for their own consumption. Production technologies are old and

mechanization is not widely introduced because of very small agricultural plots. Main products are fruits (apples, plums, pears, etc.) chestnuts, potatoes, cabbage etc.²⁷

Most of families process their products at home using traditional technology for production and preservation of local type of products as cheeses, dried meat, jams and pickles, but also several pastry products as *Flija*. These products are main attraction of related to agriculture production.

Malësi e Madhe is becoming more and more known among tourists as it has some very well-known tourist attractions, unspoiled nature with pick mountains, streams and mountain rivers, peaceful lakes and a special cultural heritage. Development of tourism is in its first steps, but with high potential to become main development resource in the area.

Potential for diversification exists such as the development of closed cycles of MAPs production from seeds, plants to essential oils. This would increase farmers' income due to added value and reduce their dependency on local buyers and exporters.

Another alternative would be the development of bouquet market of MAPs, which has a high value. This would require investment in a line of selection, cleaning and packing. At farmers level the packing can be done in large quantity since the one in smaller quantities would require large investments.

An interesting alternative will be the diversification of the dairy processing,

26. Gawrych, George (2006). *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874–1913*. London: IB Tauris. pp. 31–32. ISBN 9781845112875.

27. TCPF: Initial support to development of smallholders TCP/ALB/3701/C1, Feasibility study on agricultural smallholders and rural develop-ment in the four Municipalities in Albania: Belsh, Korce, Malesi e Madhe and Vlora – Economic, social and environmental potentials and challenges. Budapest, June 2019

however under the condition of strict compliance with National Minimum Standards to sell formally on the local market/ in Albania. Similar to what has been already discussed above for Korca, also here the mountain pastures offer high-quality grazing with beneficial effects on the organoleptic traits of the milk. To this purpose, it is worth to mention that a variety of hard cheese is already produced in the area and this is a precious experience background to further differentiate the production.

Agritourism/mountain tourism could be another alternative for income diversification. There are several examples such as in Theth (supported by GIZ), Razem, i.e. as a starting or end point of the mountain tours.

There are some international organizations supporting agritourism in the area. USAID has provided two grants of 20,000 USD to upgrade and complete current investments made in the area; and the NGO VIS (funded by the Italian cooperation) provides smaller grants of 2,000-8,000 Euro to a number of farmers for developing agritourism. VIS is working with a women incubator in Reci area with the main products be based on chestnut processing. As far as chestnut is a seasonal product and cannot keep women engaged during the whole year, VIS is planning to expand their activity even in other sectors as processing of MAPs and other local products.

Tourism attractions: Malësi e Madhe includes two natural regional parks as Shkodra lake and Shkrel national park. In this are there are several natural attractions as: "Eye of Shegan", "Kelmendi fort", "Gjoni eye", "Vukli source", "Vermoshi Kanyon", "Puci cave", "Well of Gjek Marku", "Cave of wet people", "Poica Kanyon", "Reci chestnuts", etc.

The image of agritourism in Malësi e Madhe

Main pillars of agritourism image in Malësi e Madhe:

- Natural beauties of mountains and valleys, forests, river and streams. clean air and very good climate,
- Typical local products from livestock, lambs and goat kids with very tasty meat. Pork raised in extensive farming and used as fresh meat or as dried meat, cheeses as Mishavin etc. Agricultural products as fresh and processed fruits. Pickles produced during autumn and consumed all over the year. Very special multiflora honey, or single floral honey from Chestnut. Etc.
- Very distinct typicity and unmodified farming and cultural tradition

Tourist Image of the area:

"The taste of pristine tradition of Albanian alps, accompanied with clean mountain waters under the breeze of beech forests and the sound of bells of sheep grazing on rich mountain pastures".

Profile of the tourism market in Malësi e Madhe.

- Mountain climate tourists. This is one of most large groups, (approx. with age above 40) which prefer to spend some days in mountain climate, fresh area and cool temperature even during summer. They stay from two to ten days.
- Nature exploration tourists (hiking, horse riding). This is actually the largest group of tourism. Their age is from 18 to 50 years. They like

hiking and exploring the nature, mountains, peaks, valleys etc. They spend two to five days in the area and spend most of the time hiking and climbing or horse riding.

- Tourists of traditional cuisine and local products (wine, cheese, honey). This is not a separate group of tourists in Malësi e Madhe but mixed with other above-mentioned groups.
- Tourists with special passions (explorers of biodiversity), hunters etc., are another group interested to come in the area. There is no specific age groups for these type of tourists. Their stay in the area is a few days.
- Beach tourists, is a very small group that uses the lake side of Shkodra Lake. They are mainly locals who go for swim or bath on daily basis.
- Other groups listed below, are less important, but should be kept under attention:
 - Tourists coming for business;
 - Transitional tourists;
 - Weekend tourists;
 - Relatives returning home (immigrants);
 - Visits to relatives.

Almost all tourism categories listed in the first four groups are interested or related with local products, and agriculture products. These activities could be strongly linked with agritourism. So tourist activities in Malësi e Madhe are a combination of nature tourism, cultural tourism and agritourism.

Problems related to the agritourism development

Agritourism attractions

While some local products are known and act as attraction, there are much more local products which need more promotion (for example, potatoes, cheeses, honey, Kelmendi trout, mountain tea, lavender and other MAPs etc.). Local fests and celebrations could be better used to promote local products and traditional dishes. Some products could be promoted through some typical fests as Sage day. Organization of local fairs may be useful for promoting local dishes and typical products eg. Kacamaku , maza , etc.

General tourism problems

- Lack of maintenance of the road infrastructure and hiking paths to tourist attractions;
- There is no support or funding for some events, activities which need more promotion;
- There are some objects, tourist attractions such as caves or traces of objects which are not included so far as tourism attraction, as for example “ Eye of Shegani “; “ Dried Stream” caves ; “Canyons of Selce “. Those should be included in the travel guides, or other unexposed objects as eg “Sheni I Rrjollit “ as the source of water and canyon;
- The identification signs for tourist objects are missing;
- There are several religious festivals as such “Saint John “, “Saint Mehilli “ in Boge that can be used as tourist attraction, which can be combined with visits

to the Church or the Castle and that can be included in the tourist guides.

Problems related to the marketing of agriturismo:

- A local strategy for developing tourism and agritourism in the area is missing.
- Local agricultural products and culinary should be promoted in much larger scale, as little has been done until now.
- There are a couple of guidebooks on authentic tourism, but the information on agritourist attraction is limited. Flyers are prepared but only for some areas.
- The web page of Koplik municipality and other social media should be more active in promoting tourism and especially agritourism attractions.
- Web pages and social media of different tourist businesses and guesthouses should be updated and promote natural, and cultural resources of the area.
- TV advertisements and spots on agritourism and other tourist facilities should be prepared and transmitted.
- Tourist information centers should be more active expanding the working days and hours and distribute information through brochures and fliers. They should give information and coordinate bookings for all guesthouses, especially for those who do not have their own webpages.
- There is a need for capacity building in fields as hospitality, promotion of local products, food safety, knowledge of English language for communication with foreign tourists etc.
- Problems in tourist infrastructure, such as lack of tourist signages, roads to tourist attractions, waste management.
- In some areas there are problems with electricity supply. Guesthouses use generators for producing electricity in case of blackout. This is reflected on quality and costs of the services.
- GSM and internet supply are poor in some areas.
- In some areas there is a lack of drinking water, even though in mountain areas there are a lot of natural springs.
- The network of waste management should be improved and more spread in the territory (i.e. more trash bins and closer to B&B).
- Tourist signs system and network should be improved.
- There is a problem with the maintenance of the road infrastructure, especially the one that connects the villages or tourist points.
- Medical emergency assistance during tourist season should be improved.

Problems related to hospitality:

Because of missing experience, service providers have problems related to services to tourists. There is an urgent need to improve services in all aspects. There is no clear policy for defining the prices for services. Prices fluctuate according to preferences. Abuse with service prices may damage the image of the area.

Training needs on hospitality:

- Training on different aspects of hospitality to tourists, such as calculation of prices for services, minimum standards for accommodation, basics of communication with tourist, presentation of local products, their history and production/ cooking process, etc.
- Training on diversification of products that can be used in food services, restaurants and guesthouses
- Training on food safety and quality standards of products and services
- Training related to certification of some local products
- Training on marketing of services and products through websites and social media;
- Training for the preparation of tourist guides;
- Training for communication in English language.

Cooperation among stakeholders related to the agritourism development

- General aspects:

- Cooperation is spontaneous, irregular and not contract based.
- In rural areas of Malesia Madhe there is a considerable number of B&B.
- The concept of agritourism and the way an agritourism works is not known.
- Often a guest house is confused with an agritourism entity.
- Tourist agencies have a prominent role. Travel agencies are an important source of advertising B&B for visitors.
- There is a presence of donors in promoting the creation of B&B.
- Farmers, restaurant entrepreneurs, representatives of municipalities, do not have necessary knowledge about possibilities for cooperation, the concepts of networks, contracts.
- There is an informal level of cooperation among farms, B&B, restaurants, local governments, tourist agencies.
- There are also cases of Associations for agricultural cooperation, which intend to expand their activity by building guesthouses with food service in rural areas (Reci case).
- Municipality of Koplík, does not play a significant role to support the development of agro-tourism. It does not organize mass events, it does not promote cooperation between actors, etc. This could be improved.

Table 5. Stakeholders and factors that have a motivating or hindering role in collaboration

Stakeholders/factors	Their motivating role	Their hindering role
Tourism agencies	Bring visitors through tour guides	Dictating prices in informal agreements with guesthouses
Local government (municipality) and central government	Tourism office in the municipality, but it needs to be more active; Placed signs in tourist areas	Lack of funding that fosters cooperation; Land ownership certificates not yet available and this restrains investments and application for different funding.
Local products	Local products are reasons for cooperation. According to farmers, high quality of local products promotes cooperation.	
Farmers	In some cases farmers sell their products on the basis of cooperation agreements (contracts).	Lack of cooperative spirit; Lack of trust; Lack of good practices of cooperation
Personal acquaintances		Do to the lack of personal acquaintances, farmers often do not cooperate with B&B to sell their products.
Donors	Funding and capacity building	IPARD requires a lot of documents
Agricultural extension service	Encourage cooperation by promoting increased production, benefits, innovation, etc.	
Leadership		No farmer, B&B entrepreneurs, or others to be attractive as leader for association between different stakeholders

According to the interviewees, some of the reasons for the need for cooperation between the actors are as follows:

- Need for exchanging information
- exchange of experience
- To increase offer and for reaching the market

