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## DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRITOURISM IN MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

K.A. PYLYPENKO<sup>1</sup>, O.A. MARCHENKO<sup>2</sup>, N.V. RUNCHEVA<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Melitopol State Pedagogical University named after Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

**Abstract.** This comprehensive analysis explores the potential of agritourism in Moldova and Ukraine as a means of promoting rural development, attracting tourists, and preserving cultural heritage. The study examines the unique features of agritourism in each country, including wine tourism, traditional rural estates, ecological farms, and cultural festivals. It also highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by agritourism businesses in both regions. The article explores the basic principles and strategies for the successful implementation of agritourism projects. Key takeaways include the growing popularity of agritourism, its potential economic benefits, and the importance of effective strategies to attract and retain tourists. The analysis identifies specific areas for development, such as improving infrastructure, promoting local products and providing unique experiences. The study concluded that agritourism can play a significant role in revitalizing rural areas and contributing to sustainable economic growth in both Moldova and Ukraine.

**Keywords:** *agritourism, farms, profitability, rural areas, infrastructure, investments.*

Agrotourism is a type of non-agricultural activity that can satisfy the needs of tourists for recreation and health, as well as expand the range of activities of the rural population.

In European countries, agritourism is considered one of the main levers of economic growth in rural areas and is therefore encouraged at the state level and considered as part of the Common Agricultural and Rural Policy (CARPE) in accordance with the "Program of Integrated Social and Economic Development of Rural territory".

Agritourism is defined as the provision of tourist services by farmers at home. These services primarily include accommodation and meals, but may also include other services such as leisure activities for tourists. The essence of agro-tourism activity is the use of farming, which serves as a source of ethnographic attraction, a real recreational potential in harmony with nature.

Thus, considering the economic development of the Republic of Moldova in this context, we see that the share of the rural population in Moldova is decreasing over the years, but the tourist attractiveness of the villages is only increasing. Local and foreign tourists find it pleasant to spend time in nature and in comfortable conditions. For these purposes, guest houses, rural guesthouses or ethno-villas in picturesque places of the country are perfect.

After the difficult years of the pandemic, the tourism business is gaining momentum and holidaymakers are once again flocking to the countryside. Owners say that their guesthouses provide jobs and help breathe life into villages that have been deserted. There is interest from tourists, both local and international. Foreign projects and foundations support such initiatives and allocate funding for specific purposes.

In particular, guest houses have become another help for local residents. They can sell their products in their native village, and they no longer need to go to the city. There is always demand as long as there is a flow of tourists. New enterprises and other business elements appear, and the village comes to life.

Tourists come to agro-villages not so much for comfort and relaxation in nature, but for new, even exotic experiences for foreigners. Some are only happy to take part in the work on the farm, feed the animals, milk the cow with their own hands or make hay, others go to the kitchen to see how traditional Moldovan dishes are prepared.

Since 2014, when USAID's first Rural Competitiveness and Resilience Project in Moldova was launched, the agricultural sector has been supported to accelerate transformational development and build resilience. More than 40 tourism enterprises in Moldova received financial support, as well as mentoring, assistance, and training.

Several Moldovan guest houses have become winners of the Global Culinary Tourism Awards competition of the International Culinary Tourism Association.

Currently, agritourism in Moldova is becoming an increasingly popular destination for tourists who want to immerse themselves in rural life, nature and traditions of this country. Moldova is known for its picturesque landscapes, vineyards and rich agricultural culture, which makes it an attractive destination for agritourism.

The peculiarities of agritourism in Moldova are represented by the following areas.

1. Moldova is one of the oldest wine-producing countries in the world. Wine routes include visits to local wineries where you can taste wine, visit wine cellars and learn about the wine production process. The most famous wineries are Cricova, Purcari, Milestii Mici.

2. There are many traditional rural estates in Moldova where tourists can stay, taste local cuisine, take part in farm work and enjoy the tranquillity of nature. Such farmsteads offer a variety of activities: fishing, mushroom and berry picking, and excursions around the village.

3. In many regions of Moldova, there are ecological farms where you can learn about organic farming, take part in harvesting or caring for animals. These farms often offer organic products and dishes.

4. Rural areas of Moldova are famous for their authentic cuisine. Tourists can visit local farms or estates to learn how to cook traditional Moldovan dishes such as placindi, mamalyga or handmade cheeses.

5. Moldova has a rich calendar of festivals, many of which are related to agriculture and traditions. For example, in autumn, there is a grape and wine harvest festival, where you can see traditional dancing, music and wine tasting.

6. Moldova has several nature reserves where you can go hiking or cycling. The most famous parks are Codri and Orhei National Park, which offer amazing views and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Agro-tourism in Moldova offers an authentic experience, allowing tourists to feel the rhythm of rural life and appreciate the natural beauty of the country [1].

In addition, Moldova has excellent potential for the development of active, green and event tourism. In particular, a unique product with kayaking on the Dniester and stays in green estates is offered in Vadui lui Voda. Green estates offer authentic cuisine, masterclasses, and outdoor activities such as horseback riding, cycling, and more. Many estates and wineries provide opportunities for conferences, events, and celebrations.

Competitiveness depends on the following components: quality; use of modern technology in the development of a tourist product; adequate quality-price match; constant demand; and staff qualifications [2].

Agrarian tourism in Ukraine is usually represented by farms, agritourism farms, organic farms, wineries, traditional workshops, ethnographic museums and other locations that provide opportunities for recreation, excursions and active participation in agricultural processes. Below are the key regions and popular agritourism destinations in Ukraine:

- Zakarpattia (famous for its wineries. There are many family-owned wineries that offer tastings, tours and talk about the wine production process. You can also visit craft cheese dairies in the region, where different types of cheese are made from cow's and sheep's milk);
- Lviv region (many farms offer visitors the opportunity to taste local products, work in the field or in the garden. The Yavoriv region is known for traditional crafts, such as the production of Yavoriv toys and embroidery);

- Carpathians (on mountain farms, you can not only enjoy the beautiful scenery, but also join in milking cows, picking berries and mushrooms. Sheep farms offer excursions and masterclasses in making bryndza and budzu);
- Poltava region (you can visit farms where traditional Ukrainian dishes are prepared from local products of traditional Ukrainian cuisine. There are also many agritourism complexes in the region, including open-air ethnographic museums with the opportunity to try your hand at crafts);
- Odesa region (known for its wineries, where you can see the entire production process, from grape harvesting to tasting the finished product. There are also farms that grow vegetables, fruits and cereals without the use of chemical fertilisers, the so-called organic farms);
- Volyn region (visits to apiaries where you can learn more about the honey production process and buy natural products. Traditional crafts are well developed: here you can learn pottery, weaving and other folk crafts);
- Kherson region (eco-farms provide an opportunity to see how organic vegetables and fruits are grown and to try these products).

The analysis of the agritourism potential in Ukraine demonstrates an assessment of the natural and cultural resources that can be attractive to tourists. The main benefits that agritourism development can bring to farms can be outlined in the following list.

1. Strategy for attracting and retaining tourists, namely, consideration of effective strategies for attracting and retaining agritourists; studying the importance of creating a comfortable and environmentally friendly infrastructure for guests.
2. Use of agritourism for rural development with an analysis of the impact of agritourism on the development of infrastructure and social space in rural areas; research on opportunities to attract investment to improve the lives of local people.
3. Addressing challenges and risks, which means highlighting possible challenges and risks associated with the introduction of agritourism and proposals for their solution.
4. Application of successful practices in the form of presenting specific examples of successful agritourism projects in other countries and their impact on farm development.

The directions of strategic development of farms in Ukraine are aimed at:

- diversification of production, where farms can develop areas of production, including agritourism, which helps to reduce risks and stabilise incomes, as practice shows, when conducting this business, incomes can be increased by 30%;
- optimisation of agricultural processes - the introduction and use of modern and innovative technologies increase production efficiency, reduce costs and improve product quality;
- development of local markets and consumer demand through active engagement with local markets, which will contribute to the development of consumer demand for local agricultural products;
- effective management of resources: land, water, and other natural resources will contribute to the sustainable development of farms;
- training and development of soft skills among farmers will remove the fear of introducing modern agricultural technologies, as well as hospitality skills for the implementation of agritourism projects;
- combining two areas of business, farming and agritourism, will give a new impetus to the development of not only farms but also local communities and will attract investors to develop this business niche.

By combining agritourism and farms, we will get a strategy for the development of the region, increase interest in partnership, investment and infrastructure development not only in the communities but also in Ukraine as a whole.

The development of marketing strategies is based on the use of the potential of farms and the development of cooperation, so the following is an interpretation of the organisational measures [3, p. 351].

1. Selling the uniqueness of their products and services. Farms should emphasise the uniqueness of their offer, attracting tourists based on local characteristics and unique farming experiences.

2. Partnership and cooperation in various areas of interest. Cooperation with local entrepreneurs and organisations and individuals. Establish partnerships with local restaurants, workshops and other entrepreneurs to create a comprehensive agritourism offer.

3. Invest in training and development to increase communication skills. Increase knowledge and skills of staff through platforms and collaborations. Investing in training for farmers and farm staff to improve service and hospitality skills in agritourism.

4. Create interactive infrastructures through the use of experimental and interactive zones. Develop interactive zones for tourists where they can participate in agricultural processes and learn more about local life.

5. Support from the state through programmes, grants, and project funding. The development of incentive programmes from government agencies can be aimed at supporting farms that develop agritourism.

Successful integration of agritourism projects on farms requires improving various aspects: from the organisational structure to interaction with consumers of tourism services. Here are some key principles and strategies for achieving success in this area.

Creating a unique product or service offering that makes the agritourism project different from others can be done through unique experiences or products that visitors can obtain.

Market orientation through careful research of the target audience and identification of needs and expectations.

Adapting your offer to meet the requirements of the target audience through interactive interaction, creating opportunities for visitors to engage with farm work and natural processes. Developing possible options for participation in various agritourism activities, such as fruit picking, gardening, etc.

All of this is possible through educational methods when providing visitors with information about agricultural processes and the importance of agriculture. It is through the organisation of workshops, lectures or excursions to raise awareness that attention can be drawn to ecological consumption and agritourism services, which will help create a comfortable environment:

It is also worth taking care of and providing amenities for visitors (parking, toilets, recreation areas, etc.). By creating a pleasant atmosphere for relaxation and discovery for guests, the owner builds a good name and reputation.

Collaboration with other local businesses (restaurants, shops and other households) will give a boost to the region's economy and stakeholders. These include housing and communal services, transport, communications, trade, tourism, public administration, education, healthcare, household, engineering, consulting, and legal services [4, p. 31].

These principles and strategies will help to create an effective and competitive agritourism project in the context of the development of agricultural business entrepreneurs in both countries.

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