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SUSTAINABLE AGRITOURISM FEASIBILITY IN THE MODRAC LAKE REGION, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Abstract

This paper assesses the feasibility of introducing agritourism as a form of sustainable tourism development in the Modrac Lake Region, with a particular focus on Kiseljak. The research examines development potential, market demand, stakeholder readiness, infrastructural and organizational constraints, minimum service standards and opportunities for integrating local products into the tourism value chain. The empirical research applied three instruments to local producers and households, institutions and public services, and market, tourism and hospitality actors, with qualitative validation through four focus groups. The analysis combines descriptive statistics, multiple-response analysis, cross-tabulations and thematic coding of open-ended answers and focus-group findings. The results indicate that agritourism is feasible only as a phased, pilot-oriented and spatially responsible model based on local products, households, short visits, tastings, educational content and small thematic routes. The contribution of the paper lies in linking sustainable tourism, collaborative destination governance and stakeholder readiness into a practical framework for gradual agritourism development.

Key Words: *agritourism, tourism entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism development, destination governance, Modrac Lake Region, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

JEL classification: *M10, L26, L83, Q01*

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Introduction

Contemporary tourism development increasingly emphasizes sustainability, authenticity, local resources and community participation. Rural tourism and agritourism are particularly relevant because they enable diversification of local economies, valorization of agricultural and natural resources and creation of additional value through local food, hospitality and the experience of place. While rural tourism refers more broadly to tourism activity in rural areas, agritourism is distinguished by its functional link with agricultural activity, a household, a farm or a local product (Phillip et al., 2010; Rosalina et al., 2021).

The growing interest in agritourism reflects changes in tourist demand, especially the search for authentic experiences, local gastronomy, nature-based activities, educational content and more sustainable forms of travel. However, agritourism should not be understood only as a market opportunity. It is a complex development process requiring resources, minimum service standards, institutional support, organizational capability and cooperation among local actors. Its contribution to income diversification, local value chains and the inclusion of women and youth depends on the extent to which development is aligned with spatial, environmental and social preconditions (Šajn & Finer, 2023; Bhatta et al., 2025).

The Modrac Lake Region, with a particular focus on Kiseljak, provides a relevant context for assessing sustainable agritourism. The area combines natural resources, agricultural production, local products, proximity to an urban market and potential for experience-based tourism. At the same time, it faces infrastructural, environmental, organizational and market-related constraints. The Tourism Development Strategy of Tuzla Canton 2024–2029 recognizes rural tourism and agritourism as relevant development forms, while spatial documents for the Modrac accumulation area emphasize the need to align development with environmental and land-use constraints (Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Transport of Tuzla Canton, 2024; IPSA Institute, 2018).

The aim of the paper is to assess the feasibility of establishing sustainable agritourism in the Modrac Lake Region, with a particular focus on Kiseljak, through the analysis of development potential, market demand, stakeholder readiness, infrastructural and organizational constraints, minimum service standards and opportunities for integrating local

products into the tourism value chain. The paper asks to what extent the Modrac Lake Region possesses the preconditions for developing a sustainable, market-acceptable and organizationally feasible agritourism model.

Theoretical and contextual framework

In academic literature, agritourism is understood as a specific form of tourism activity directly related to agricultural production, a household or a farm. Unlike the broader concept of rural tourism, which includes various forms of stay, recreation and experience in rural areas, agritourism requires that agricultural activity, a local product, a farm or the experience of production play an important role in shaping the tourism offer (Phillip et al., 2010). This distinction is important for the Modrac Lake Region because the development opportunity cannot rely only on the attractiveness of the lake area, but must be connected to local products, households and an authentic rural experience.

Rural tourism is a heterogeneous concept in which nature, culture, local food, small service providers, recreation and sustainability intersect (Rosalina et al., 2021). Within this framework, agritourism is distinguished by a closer link with production and households, as well as by its potential to base the visitor experience on education, tasting, hospitality, interpretation of local culture and direct product sales. Chase and Luke (2022) underline that agritourism value is created through the comprehensive experience that connects the visitor with the farm, the host and the local way of life.

The contemporary approach to agritourism is oriented toward experiential and sustainable supply. Successful agritourism integrates local products, authenticity, visitor safety, interpretation of place, service quality and a clear business logic (Tomatis et al., 2024). Economically, it can increase household income and strengthen local value chains; socially, it can include women, youth and small producers; environmentally, its value depends on spatially responsible and low-impact use of resources. Bhatta et al. (2025) connect agritourism with the Sustainable Development Goals, while Partalidou and De Matteis (2024) underline its potential for agri-food system transformation.

Agritourism development can also be interpreted through a resource-based and collaborative perspective. Campbell et al. (2024) show that the

engagement of small actors in agritourism depends on available resources, institutional support and the ability to transform resources into a sustainable offer. Van Ninh and Van Tam (2026) emphasize that social capital strengthens community participation because such development relies on trust, cooperation and coordination among actors. In the Modrac Lake Region, the natural environment, local products, proximity to Tuzla and the existence of households are important but insufficient preconditions. They become development resources only when connected with infrastructure, standards, organization, market channels and a shared identity of the offer.

Therefore, this paper treats agritourism as a multidimensional development model combining agriculture, local products, households, the experience of place, sustainable resource use, market valorization and stakeholder cooperation. Such an approach makes it possible to assess feasibility not only by asking whether the area possesses resources, but also whether those resources can be transformed into an organized, standardized, market-recognizable and sustainable system of supply (Armesto-López et al., 2025; Umihanić, 2026).

Methodology

The research is based on a mixed methodological approach combining desk analysis, field mapping, survey research, structured questionnaires for key actors, focus groups and consultative insights. This approach is appropriate because the assessment of agritourism development cannot be based solely on natural and productive resources; it also requires examination of market, institutional, infrastructural, organizational and social preconditions.

Empirical research was conducted in Kiseljak and the wider Modrac Lake Region. It covered three groups of actors: local producers, farmers and households; market, tourism, hospitality and excursion-related actors; and institutions, public services and local actors relevant to spatial planning, infrastructure, environment, tourism, agriculture and local development. Data collection comprised 33 responses from producers and households, 20 responses from institutional and public actors and 30 responses from market, tourism and hospitality actors. This structure enabled the analysis of agritourism from the perspectives of supply, demand and institutional conditions.

Desk analysis was used to understand the theoretical, strategic, planning and regulatory framework. Field mapping provided insight into households, products, potential points of offer, accessibility and spatial constraints. Surveys and structured questionnaires collected data on production capacities, interest in participation, expected standards, cooperation channels and perceived barriers. Four focus groups were conducted: on agriculture and local products, on agritourism and the tourism value chain, on the role of women and on the role of youth.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple-response analysis, cross-tabulations and thematic coding of open-ended answers. In the segment of producers, households and farmers, interpretations are based on the processed sample of 33 respondents, while qualitative findings from focus groups were used to deepen and validate the results. A limitation of the research is that it assesses development feasibility rather than providing an investment or financial study. An additional limitation is the early stage of agritourism development in the area, which means that some views are based more on development perceptions than on existing market experience.

The primary data collection included four complementary sources. A survey questionnaire was completed by 33 producers, farmers and households, providing insight into supply-side resources, local products and readiness for agritourism participation. Institutional and infrastructural conditions were examined through structured questionnaires completed by 20 representatives of institutions and public services. Market demand, promotion and cooperation channels were assessed through 30 responses from market, tourism and hospitality actors. In addition, four thematic focus groups were conducted to validate, deepen and contextualize the quantitative and structured findings.

Research results

The results indicate that agritourism development in the Modrac Lake Region does not derive from a single dominant resource, but from the combination of natural environment, local products, households, proximity to urban markets, experience-based content and the need for local economic activation. Kiseljak should be viewed as a pilot area within the wider Modrac Lake Region. The key issue is not the mere existence of resources, but their organization, standardization and market valorization.

Local products and family households form the core of the potential agritourism offer. Their value lies not only in production, but also in the possibility of connecting products with tastings, on-farm sales, educational visits, small events and interpretation of place. The most realistic development model is therefore one that starts from existing households and products rather than from large infrastructural or accommodation investments.

Market potential is most visible among domestic tourists, families, excursionists, school and educational groups, and visitors interested in short stays, tastings, nature-based activities and purchases of local products. The initial model should consequently rely on simple, credible and market-understandable formats, such as on-farm sales, educational tours, farm visits and tastings.

The results also point to infrastructural and organizational constraints. Agritourism development is limited by communal and environmental issues, insufficient access, weak signage, limited sanitary conditions, actor fragmentation, weak standardization and limited digital visibility. These findings show that attractiveness and local products are insufficient without basic safety, hygiene, functionality, coordination and promotion.

Women and youth appear as important development actors. Women can contribute through processing, home cuisine, hospitality, micro-services and the preservation of culinary practices, while young people can contribute through digital promotion, organization of small events, thematic routes, visit logistics and market communication. Agritourism can therefore become both an economic and a social inclusion mechanism.

Overall, the most realistic model is one of limited but credible agritourism. It does not assume broad tourism expansion, but the gradual development of a small number of authentic formats: on-farm sales, tastings, educational visits, thematic tours, workshops and simple routes connecting local products, the story of place and nature-based experience.

Table 1: *Synthetic overview of key research findings*

Analytical dimension	Key finding	Implication for agritourism development
Local resources	Local products, households and rural environment exist	Start from existing producers and simple offer formats

Market potential	Realistic segments are domestic tourists, families, excursionists and educational groups	Focus on short visits, tastings, tours and educational content
Infrastructure and standards	Communal, environmental and technical constraints are present	Ensure minimum standards of access, hygiene and safety
Organization	Actors are fragmented and insufficiently connected	Develop a coordination model among producers, institutions and market actors
Women and youth	Recognized as carriers of future activities	Support processing, home cuisine, digital promotion and micro-entrepreneurship
Feasibility	Agritourism is feasible as a phased, pilot-oriented model	Prioritize small, authentic and market-testable formats

Source: *Author*

Discussion

The findings confirm that agritourism development in the Modrac Lake Region cannot be explained solely by the presence of natural and agricultural resources, but by the ability of local and institutional actors to transform those resources into an organized, standardized and market-recognizable offer. This corresponds to theoretical approaches according to which agritourism is based on the relationship between agriculture, households, products and the experience of place (Phillip et al., 2010; Chase & Luke, 2022).

The results also show that agritourism should be understood as a development model rather than a single service. Local products, tastings, educational visits and small events have potential only if connected with minimum standards, interpretation of place, hospitality and promotional channels. This is consistent with the view that agritourism value is created through an integrated experience linking production, space, narrative, host and visitor (Tomatis et al., 2024).

Actor fragmentation, weak standardization, limited digital visibility and the absence of a shared offer identity are key obstacles. These results confirm the importance of social capital and community participation in sustainable agritourism. In Kiseljak, individual households can hardly develop a comprehensive offer independently. Cooperation is needed

among producers, tourism and hospitality actors, public services, local government and development organizations.

In this case, sustainable agritourism does not imply only environmental protection, but also a development model appropriate to the actual capacities of the community. It requires small, low-impact and phased formats instead of rapid tourism expansion. Such an approach is consistent with the need to formalize and support smaller family-based forms of tourism and hospitality in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Umihanić & Umihanić, 2023).

Conclusion and recommendations

Theoretical and empirical findings indicate that the Modrac Lake Region, with a specific focus on Kiseljak, possesses real but still insufficiently developed preconditions for establishing sustainable agritourism. Development potential exists in local products, households, the natural environment, proximity to an urban market and the possibility of organizing shorter visits, tastings, educational content and small thematic routes. However, this potential cannot be transformed into a tourism offer without standards, coordination, promotion, spatial arrangement and strengthened local capacities.

The central conclusion is that agritourism in the Modrac Lake Region is not justified as rapid tourism expansion, but as a phased, pilot-oriented and spatially responsible model of local economic diversification. Kiseljak can serve as an initial pilot area, while the wider Modrac Lake Region provides a spatial, symbolic and market framework that can increase the visibility and attractiveness of the offer.

Development should begin with small pilot activities connecting local products, households and the experience of place. Minimum standards for receiving visitors should be defined, including access, hygiene, safety, basic signage and product presentation. A coordination model should connect producers, the local community, local government, tourism actors and development organizations. Women and young people should be included as development carriers through processing, home cuisine, micro-services, digital promotion, interpretation of place and the organization of small events.

Finally, the paper shows that the main development challenge lies in transforming existing potentials into a functional system of supply. The Modrac Lake Region has sufficient natural, productive and symbolic resources to support agritourism, but success will depend on the capacity of local and institutional actors to develop the offer gradually, in a coordinated manner and in accordance with sustainability principles.

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