

Article

Agritourism Activity—A “Smart Chance” for Mountain Rural Environment’s Sustainability

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Abstract: The debates regarding sustaining the rural world by improving the quality of life are numerous; one of the proposals being agritourism activity. This activity can be a “smart chance” for the sustainability of the mountain rural environment, because it has a multiplier effect on some important parts of economic and social life of the community. For instance, it can be an ally of agriculture, ensuring a diversification alternative for farms, an alternative for local guesthouses to capitalize their own local products, while ensuring the opportunity to obtain additional/complementary income, a possibility of adjusting the depopulation phenomenon and the abandonment of old houses and lands, at the same time offering a pleasant activity/alternative, especially for young people. In this context, the purpose followed in the paper is oriented through the transposition of agritourism activity into a “smart chance” for ensuring rural mountain sustainability. Being simultaneously an innovative and diversifying alternative, it is an actual one that starts from the study of two areas which are similar in terms of tourist potential. However, the approach is a different one, especially regarding the combination of agricultural resources with those specific to the rural way of life, and it also follows a different degree of development. Our scientific approach aims to present some aspects from the two areas, to achieve a general image of tourism potential, to identify how the agritourism activity is seen by those directly involved in its implementation, to point out some aspects due to which agritourism activity can be considered as a “smart chance” while bringing multiple benefits, and to ensure the sustainability of rural mountain areas by playing a vital role in the transition towards a more sustainable future.

Keywords: agritourism; “smart chance”; sustainability; mountain rural environment; motivations; possibility of economic growth and development

1. Introduction

Agritourism is a fragile and complex activity, but with a strong expansion in last years. Nowadays it might represent a “smart sustainable chance” to cover the concerns regarding the high quality of life in rural mountain areas/rural communities and to achieve sustainability—one of the most wanted desideratum of our times.

As an independent activity, and implicitly as a tourist offer on the market, agritourism activity appeared in Europe around the 1960s. The concerns to define agritourism are relatively sporadic and heterogeneous, having their source in the interest given to this issue by various categories of specialists. Agritourism is defined by many authors as a “different tourism” [1–5] which is a particular form of rural tourism, practiced in farms/households, with a higher degree of complexity. It comprises as a

central part of the agricultural activities, namely activities of production, processing products from their own household, and the activity of marketing these products, and, as a complementary activity, the tourism activities so that supplementary income for households/farms is obtained. Similarly, there are countries where the term agritourism can be used only to designate those activities that provide more than 50% of the total income of the household from the tourism side of the business, the rest being obtained from agricultural production [6,7].

According to the specialists, in order to differentiate agritourism from rural tourism, two aspects must be taken into account [1–9]:

- Tourist activities should not replace the agricultural ones, but they should come in as their support, as complementary activities, especially in problematic areas;
- While designing the tourism offer, the emphasis must be placed on the characteristics of life in the country, combining the resources specific to the rural environment with agricultural products, so as to maintain the purpose of being a sustainable activity from the rural environment.

The European mountain area represents a vital importance for tourism [1,10], both for tourists and for the population of the continent, as the mountain regions allow:

- The production of high-quality agricultural products;
- The contribution to the diversity of agricultural products on the European market;
- The conservation of animal and plant species, the preservation of traditions;
- To carry out industrial and tourist activities;
- To combat climate change by protecting biodiversity.

These activities were the pillar of Europe's mountain economies, but in recent years, under the auspices of the rapid evolution of society as a whole, these traditions have gradually begun to disappear. Therefore, mountain regions have transformed themselves into vulnerable areas, manifesting some distinct situations. For instance, we find communities eager to preserve the habitat and the biodiversity [11], while in others, we are witnessing a complete abandonment [12,13], and we register an effort to restore and appropriately reconstruct what has already been lost [14,15]. Unable to expand or to intensify their activity, most farms at high altitudes are gradually abandoned. Conversely, tourism has become an important industry, although it can put huge pressure on mountain environments. So far, most activities have focused on winter sports that require massive infrastructure development. The fact that the rural area is more disadvantaged from an agricultural point of view is complemented by one advantage, meaning the geography that is difficult to match. Due to these advantages, complementary "smart" activities may appear in the rural area. These generate additional incomes to supplement the means of subsistence, and the development proposals imply finding alternatives to capitalize on and mobilize current resources. Among these possible activities, there are also the agritourism ones.

A real agritourism offer is hard to find, meaning it is rare enough on the market [16,17], being found in countries such as Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Netherlands, and Belgium. Wherever agritourism is found, it has proven that it can represent a "smart chance" for sustaining the viability of mountainous rural areas [18–23]. As agritourism activity is dependent on the environment, this being its "basic element", and because the mountainous rural area has plenty of resources, but needs an alternative for capitalizing the majority of these resources [24], between the rural mountain area and the agritourism activities, there could be a whole-part relationship, the agritourism being a "possible smart chance" to solve the needs of the mountain areas. In the past two decades, at European level, the emphasis has been placed on the direct involvement of the rural community in the elaboration of decisions. Both in the case of agricultural and tourist activities, the local community is the one directly involved in the implementation of these activities, and also the one that could come up with some favorable solutions to support the development of the rural environment and appropriate infrastructure [25]. Consequently, it is important to create opportunities for those farmers who want to

provide consumers with special tourism services, in order to learn new directions for agriculture and to establish a new income source [26].

1.1. Literature Review

Definitely, in most of the European countries, agritourism activity has become a priority that could sustain rural mountain areas, as being an activity that connects aspects of socio-economic nature with local community's environmental sustainability [8,10,17,21,27–29].

Identifying and highlighting the peculiarities, together with the essence of agritourism activity, is not necessarily an easy task. Despite the scientific consensus about its definition, the manner in which it is practiced differs from context to context [8], and even within the same country, it is often confused with rural tourism. The necessity of clarifying the essence of agritourism emerges from the fact that this is more complex than the tourist activity, having some success [30], so this complex activity can be characterized by taking into consideration many levels and aspects presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The essence of agritourism activity—important aspects.

Defining Agritourism Activity	The Main Elements Resulting from the Definition	Important Aspects and Advantages from Agritourism Activity
The essence of agritourism taking in consideration agricultural activity.	Is the special activity which unites agriculture and tourism. Appears in order to diversify traditional agricultural activities by starting farm-based tourism businesses [24].	<i>Advantages for farmers and for the community</i>
The essence of agritourism taking in consideration the development of rural communities.	Authentic possibility to consolidate the local economy. Its ability to create certain dynamism in the upstream and downstream sectors and activities. A source of growth and diversification of the rural economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance of new market for agricultural local products • Creating own jobs for family and incomes goes to farmers directly • Transforming agricultural activities into attractive ones • Sustainability for agricultural businesses • Increasing the quality of living conditions in rural areas
The essence of agritourism taking in consideration its specific of being a form of rural tourism.	Accommodation is achieved by capitalizing the surplus of the accommodation places from the farm, guesthouse, villas, and tourist services being integrated into the farm and household, and intersecting with the ordinary activity of the farmer. Food comes from own production, in certain variable percentages, the services being provided by the farmer's family. In case of leisure, the emphasis is put on participating in the traditional activities of the farm or guesthouse.	<i>Benefits for tourists</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food • Relax in an active way • Participation in the life of the rural community • Return to nature

Source: Processing and interpretation according to certain bibliographical references made by the authors of the paper [31–33].

As we previously stated, that by combining various agricultural activities with resources and crafts, agritourism activity might be a chance for sustainable development of the rural environment, we went to identify the essence of agritourism activity, from taking into consideration agricultural activity, the development of rural communities and its specific of being a form of rural tourism. Thus, for each of the three aspects taken in consideration for explaining the essence of agritourism (mentioned in the first column of Table 1), we mentioned the elements that illustrate the definition (column no. 2 of Table 1) and the benefits derived from the development of the activity for tourists, for the local community and farmers (column no. 3 of Table 1):

- *The essence of agritourism taking into consideration agricultural activity.* Agritourism is a hybrid concept [34] that connects two special sectors—tourism with agriculture—in order to open new and profitable market niches for farm products and services, without becoming a dominant agricultural sector, and it can play an important contribution for many farms, by supporting them. The business choices must be made by independent farming families, when confronting the need to diversify away from traditional agricultural activities through developing farm-based tourism businesses [30].
- *The essence of agritourism taking into consideration the development of rural communities.* Due to its strong local identity, agritourism becomes a real possibility to consolidate the local economy given its recognized positive effects on generating income and jobs. Moreover, its ability to create a certain dynamism in the upstream and downstream sectors and activities promotes it as a rural economy's source of growth and diversification [35,36], determining the development of new market niches, the increase of interest in local agricultural products, the opportunity to reintroduce/keep some lands in the agricultural circuit, on-site employment for population situated in rural areas, and insurance of the most wanted aspect in the long term. All these mean sustainability for agricultural activities.
- *The essence of agritourism taking into consideration its specific of being a form of rural tourism.* Agritourism represents a subcategory of rural tourism that involves the capitalization on the surplus in the household/tourist farm through the prism of the tourist product. This product incorporates the components of a tourist product, but with some specific aspects [3]:
 - Regarding the first element, namely accommodation, it is achieved by capitalizing the surplus of the accommodation places from the farm, guesthouse, villas, and tourist services while being integrated into the farm and household, and by intersecting with the ordinary activity of the farmer;
 - Regarding the second element, namely food, this comes from their own production, in certain variable percentages. For instance, the services are provided by the farmer's family, in other words, there is a direct connection between the bidder of specific agritourist services and the tourist requesting these services;
 - Regarding the third element, namely leisure, the emphasis is put on participating in the traditional activities of the farm or guesthouse.

The difference between agritourism and rural tourism consists in the existence of the farm and the accent on agricultural activities, agritourism being a complementary activity. Therefore, agricultural activities must be carried out by the owner of the rural guesthouse/farm, and not replaced, in order to fulfill the main aim followed, that of achieving the combination of agricultural activity with tourist activity.

European mountain areas make it possible to obtain high quality products, and many existing resources contribute to this aspect. However, the gaps regarding the economies of mountain areas have supported the need of the emergence of a European mountain policy that preserves existing values, and prevents new losses. Therefore, it is necessary to empower fragile territorial balances and favor the requalification of areas at risk of abandonment, [8] with a strong emphasis on sustainability principles. Sustainability is targeted through sustaining nature, resources, and local rural community, through a strong and controlled development of economy, individuals, and society [37,38]. The sustainability of agritourism activity comes from the fact that this activity cannot be separated from socio-economic life of the community. Linking some of the most important components of sustainability [39], agritourism can represent a "smart" innovative and diversifying alternative for farms [40,41], for mountain rural environment's sustainability. [42] Moreover, sustainable entrepreneurship is playing a vital role in ensuring a sustainable future [43,44].

The interests of tourists in orienting towards the rural environment and towards agritourism as a form of tourism could be the following:

- The tourist offer is authentic, based on the specifics of the area, on its special features;
- Direct contact with specific plant species that are cultivated, with specific animals and types of animal husbandry, with types of forestry, mushrooming, wild vegetables and fruits, with the landscape, rural daily life, rural customs and practices, allows knowledge of the rural environment and familiarization of citizens with country life;
- A way of education, of responsibility towards daily tasks, especially if we are referring to children;
- Additionally, the reception places are spread over the whole rural area, the accommodation being particularized by a rustic character, so the tourists can spend their free time in various geographical conditions (mountain, hill, plain) at lower prices and rates than in the case of classic tourism.

Regarding the concept of “smart tourism”, it appeared around the year 2000, and presupposes an approach of an area as a whole and in the long term, following the planning of the sustainable capitalization of the territorial resources through tourism [45]. By consequence, the process of a normal evolution of the tourist phenomenon leads in the end to the appearance of the notion of smart tourism [46]. The evolution of the smart tourism concept has gone through several stages:

- Starting from the special emphasis placed on the origin and development of the conditions of the tourism area [47],
- continuing with the extension of this concept through the prism of a system based on elements such as: the tourist area, tourists, authorities, entrepreneurs and information centers [45,47],
- and improving the tourism model, with a focus on tourists, residents, tourism businesses, third parties from other industries as suppliers, and technologies used [46,48].

Starting from the emphasis on the consumer and the consumer’s desires, smart tourism connects the tourist with the tourist resources/infrastructure. As nothing can work individually and interaction is needed, smart tourism uses tourists, residents, tourism entrepreneurs and third parties from other industries for a sustainable approach to the environment. Therefore, in our opinion, rural areas have many tourist resources, but in order to fulfill the tourists’ requirements, it needs smart management strategies. Namely, starting from understanding the importance of the meaning of tourism activity, motivations for owners, involvement of the local authorities in order to create an original and desired tourist product, the promoting activity is a key aspect for transforming tourism or agritourism, in our case, into a smart chance for rural areas.

Starting from the definition of “smart tourism”, we would like to take into consideration the possibility that agritourism is a smart chance for rural areas, with tourist potential, but also with many disparities. Why do we think it can be a smart chance? It is because it can solve both the requirements of tourists and those of local entrepreneurs from the area in which this activity is developed, in a sustainable way:

- For tourists, it can offer authentic, original products, with an emphasis on farm life (education, responsibilities), organic gastronomic products and contact with nature;
- For local entrepreneurs/farmers it can be, in some cases, the saving solution in capitalizing on their own production, but also the possibility to acquire a new qualification;
- For the agritourism area, it can be a sustainable chance because it can generate jobs, capitalize on products and local crafts, ensuring the increase of living standards.

In summary, it is because it values the combination of agricultural activities with tourism, because it is able to increase the standard of living and because, unlike traditional tourism, it emphasizes the protection of tourist resources, it can be a chance for sustainable development of the rural environment.

1.2. Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to study the particularities of agritourism activity, as an actual or future opportunity for ensuring rural mountain area’s sustainability. We took into consideration and compared

two areas, similar in terms of tourism potential, but with a differentiated approach, starting from the combination of agricultural resources and reaching to those specificities of the rural life, and at the same time, with a different degree of agritourism activity development.

In achieving the aim of the paper, we described: Apuseni Mountains and Alps Mountains-Trento Province in terms of potential for agritourism activity. Consequently, we tried to determine the vision on this activity from the perspective of the owners of agritourism structures from these two regions through a survey. Finally, based on the conclusions drawn, we tried to come up with some proposals of strategies and measures. Their implementation in the lower developed area can sustain the development of the agritourism sector and not only it. For that matter, the main objectives, through which we sustain the aim pursued, will follow aspects such as:

1. Identifying the essence of agritourism activity, of differences compared to rural tourism and of the reason why there is a link between agritourism and sustainability.
2. Presenting some aspects regarding the favorability for agritourism activity (taking into consideration the existing potential), in order to achieve a general image of tourism potential from these two regions: Apuseni Mountains and Alps Mountains-Trento Province.
3. Determining the extent in which agritourism activity from the two areas is considered, a possibility of own economic growth and development by the owners.
4. Identifying some management strategies in order to support the role of agritourism activity as a future “smart chance” for mountain rural environment’s sustainability.

The justification for choosing these two areas derives from the following facts: The Italian area is currently an eloquent model of combining natural and agricultural resources with handicrafts. Consequently, in time, the owners of agritourism structures from the region manage to ensure the sustainability of rural and mountain communities, considering that the special potential of this area is “smart”, capitalized through agritourism and that the number of tourist structures from this category is in a sustained growth. The Italian area is one of the few mountain areas that have another strong point, namely adequate legislation, which points very well to the specifics of agritourism.

The second region, Apuseni Mountains, recently internationally recognized as “one of the 20 most beautiful tourist destinations” [49], is characterized through remarkable potential, with numerous aspects from rural environment available to be capitalized through agritourism. However, this region is a little bit younger in terms of agritourism development, but with real chances. In order to launch on the agritourism market, it still has to develop a lot of aspects, representing, at the same time, an initiative and a challenge.

In addition to comparing two similar geographical areas as potential, we wanted to highlight somewhat the “chance” that agritourism, can offer to a mountainous area. It is true, though, that it is necessarily a good organization, and obviously, has tourist potential, but the development of agritourism activities could come as a “chance” to solve the disparities from rural areas. The Italian area is currently an eloquent model of combining natural and agricultural resources with handicrafts. The second region, Apuseni Mountains, is a little bit younger in terms of agritourism development, but recently internationally recognized with real potential for this type of activity. The development of agritourism activities in the Romanian area should come as a “chance” to solve the disparities they currently face.

We wanted, in the paper, to identify if there is a desire/motivation to practice this activity, if there is necessary knowledge, if there is involvement from local authorities, and obviously, the resources needed to carry out the activity. Starting from these realities, we try to propose the measures by which agritourism can be a sustainable solution for rural areas, pointing the multiplier effect of agritourism activity on the social life of the community.

It cannot be said that agritourism is a new phenomenon in European countries, but what is different, is its evolution from country to country. The development of agritourism can support a sustainable economic development of rural localities, due to the multiplier effect of this activity, feeling

the positive influences on the entire rural environment. The reason for comparing the two areas is to highlight the way in which two areas with similar potential can have a different degree of development of agritourism due to the vision and strategic elements used in the development and capitalization of traditional products through agritourism.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted by taking into consideration two mountain rural regions: Apuseni Mountains area and Alps Mountain-Trento Province. Consequently, the idea was to take into consideration and compare two areas which are important for their development degree, while using a questionnaire to gather information, draw some conclusions and finally, to issue some proposals.

In order to pursue the aim of this scientific paper, the one of emphasizing the particularities and essence of agritourism activity, but also to identify the reasons why this type of activity from the two regions with a different development degree is or can be a “smart chance” for mountain rural environment’s sustainability, we have followed some separate stages (see Figure 1): Firstly, we have established the main sources to gather theoretical information in order to document the issues pursued, so we have made the office research (we have combined some studies in the field with statistical information obtained from the National Institute of Statistics and Agriturismo Trentino to realize the theoretical basis of the paper); secondly, by means of a predetermined questionnaire, an attempt has been made to obtain information from the field, namely from the two areas of our research: Apuseni Mountains and Alps Mountains-Trento Province; thirdly we have processed the information obtained from the application of the questionnaires in order to obtain preliminary conclusions—conclusions that afterwards have represented the basis for future development proposals.

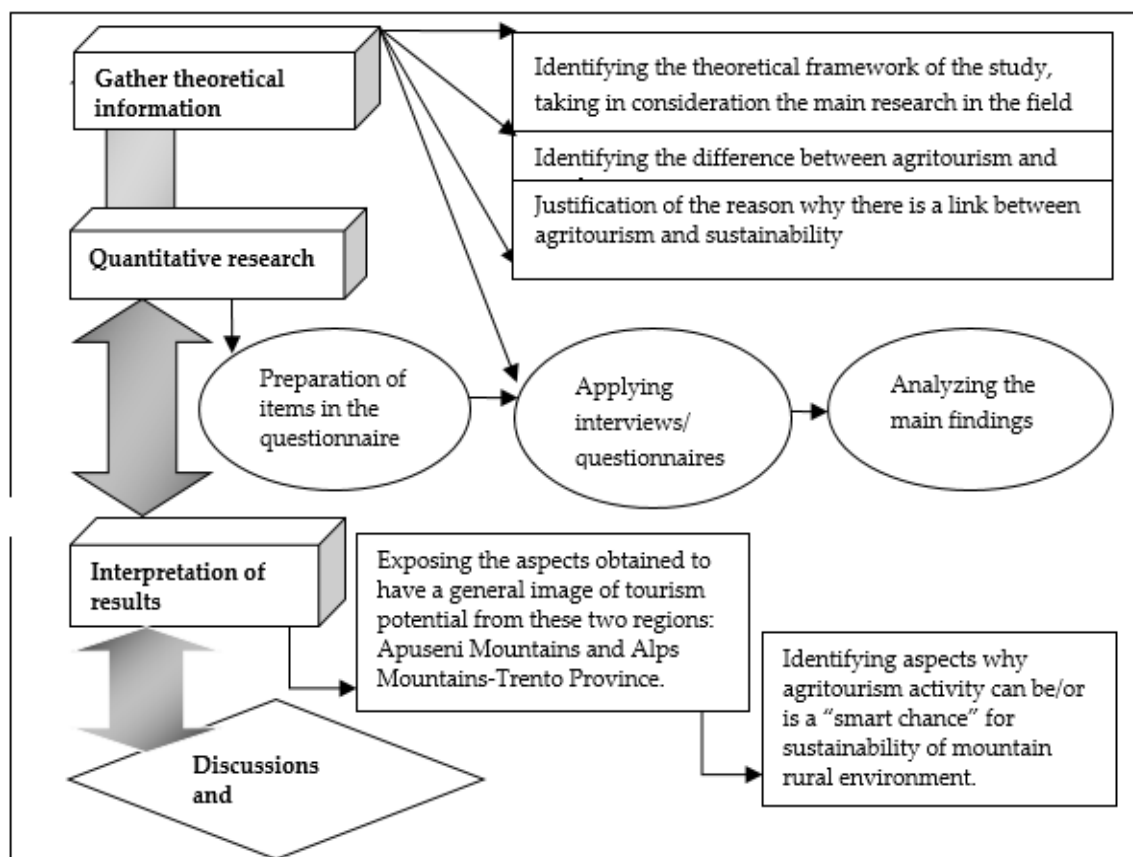


Figure 1. Research steps and actions pursued.

In order to support the importance of the agritourism activity, it is necessary to identify some priorities and measures, proposed for the improvement of the agritourism activity/product, as to be a “smart tool” for the local community’s development. Thus, the factors taken into account, those that influence the activity, within the two areas studied, are different, due to the different development degree, therefore, the multi-criteria analysis may be appropriate. In achieving the goal of the paper, we have used, as a method of research, the multi-criteria analysis [50–53], a popular method for studying or solving aspects involving qualitative data, starting from several aspects which cannot be turned into quantitative elements, and there are several criteria to be taken in consideration during the assessment process [54]. We have used this particular method because the main aspects of agritourism phenomenon are not the same, in both areas. Moreover, we have used different data sources in order to make a descriptive situation of the two areas [55,56], allowing the observation of the agritourism dynamics [57], and also to take into account both the differences and similarities between the two cases of mountainous regions chosen for comparison.

Thus, the first step is to identify the main characteristics of the areas; second, to identify the main differences; third, to determine the development degree of agritourism activity from the two areas based on a set of surveys; fourth, to analyze the data obtained, and fifth, to find the benefits of this activity for rural mountain areas and to obtain some of the “best” measures as proposals for the improvement of the agritourism activity/product.

Even if the two regions have a different degree of development, a common set of questions was established as basis for the elaboration of the questionnaire:

- Identification of the owners of agritourism structures’ characteristics from the two areas: Alps Mountains-Trento Province and Apuseni Mountains;
- Identification of farmers’ motivation from the two regions for carrying out agritourism activity, and how they understand/see the agritourism activity;
- Identification of the aspects related to the capitalization of the two locations through agritourism activities, namely specialized training for agritourism activity, the existence of tourist and access infrastructure, the dimension and approach of the agricultural activity developed by the owner;
- Identification of some aspects related to the extent in which agritourism activity, from the two areas, is considered by the owners a possibility of own economic growth and development, through the
- Identification of some management strategies to support the improvement of the agritourism activity/product, so as to transform agritourism in a “smart tool” for alternative income sources and ensuring sustainability of the local community.

The questionnaire was applied by three members of our research team during 2019–2020 period (in the summer and winter seasons) through interviews addressed to the owners of agritourism structures, taking into consideration the ones practicing both agriculture and tourism.

There are also some critical aspects that are considered limits of the current study, which appeared during this research:

- Establishing the purely agritourist structures which, to be taken under study, represented a problematic aspect;
- Another problem was the geographical areas of the research, which, being very large, have generated a longer period of time for the application of questionnaires.

Not all structures were taken under study. The selection of agritourism structures (farm/agritourist guesthouses) from each of the two areas was made by taking into account their representativeness for agritourism activity. We have considered worthwhile to be taken into account those agritourist structures that implied the practice of agricultural and touristic activities at the same time. Thus, the selected agritourist structures were as follows:

- In the Alps Mountain-Trento Province area, there are a total number of 328 agritourist structures. We tried to take into consideration the structures with representativeness for agritourism activity. We intended to survey 150 structures from each area, but not all owners wanted to participate in our study. In the case of the Italian area, the problem of time also arose, so we considered, as being valid, only those questionnaires to which the owners fully answered, respectively, 119 answers/structures.
- The Romanian area has approximately 285 agritourism structures; initially, we proposed to introduce, in the study, the same number of 150 structures. However, even in this case, the time, the large geographical area and the fact that not all the owners wanted to answer our questions determined us to take into consideration 142 answers/structures.

We conclude to state that there are 39 owners, (namely 31 from Alps Mountain-Trento Province, 8 from Apuseni Mountains), that refuse to be part of our study (so we do not have any information from them to take into consideration in the final results); so in the end we take into consideration 119 answers/structures from the Italian part (36.28% from the total number of structures from the area) and 142 answers/structures from the Romanian part (55.03% from the total number of structures from the area).

After we solved the critical aspects, we made an empirical analysis of the data obtained, using EXCEL, and the main conclusions were drawn.

3. Results

3.1. Presentation of Some Aspects from the Areas of the Research—Current Situation and Comparisons

The scientific paper aims to present some aspects regarding agritourism activity and potential of two areas: an Italian area and a Romanian area, then to identify how the agritourism activity is seen by those directly involved in its implementation, and to point out some aspects due to which agritourism activity can be considered as a “smart chance” for the less developed mountain area, going through several stages:

- A literature review on key aspects regarding agritourism activity and his benefits;
- Comparing the two mountain areas: Apuseni Mountains and Alps Mountains-Trento Province to achieve a general image;
- Identifying the extent in which agritourism is or can be a possibility of own economic growth and development;
- Proposals of some measures to ensure a future support of agritourism activity in order to be a suitable sustainable chance for rural environment.

The first area brought in discussion is *the Italian area of the Alps Mountains-Trento Province*. Our choice is due to the fact that Trentino agritourism is currently an eloquent model of combining natural resources with agriculture, tourism and crafts in such a way that it succeeds in developing rural and mountainous communities. The characteristics of the provincial territory and the particularities of Trentino’s agricultural activities support the development of this form of tourism, which is a valid method to integrate the income of the agricultural enterprise, especially in the marginal areas. Agritourism is a special tourist offer for the persons who appreciate the rural environment with natural, cultural, historical resources and gastronomic traditions. The province is divided into eleven tourist areas: Valli di Fiemme, Valli di Fassa, Valli di Primiero, La Bassa Valsugana e Tesino, Alta Valsugana, Val d’Adige, Val di Non, Val di Sole, Valli Giudicarie, Alto Garda, Vallagarina, all with remarkable tourist potential.

In addition to the special tourist potential, the Italian area is one of the few mountain areas that have another strong point, namely an adequate legislation, which points out very well the specifics of the agritourism activity. According to Italian Law 96/2006, agritourism represents the activity connected to agriculture; it can be developed only by farmers, therefore it is emphasized by a special

connection/relationship between agricultural holding and tourism. Additionally, in Italian law, there are mentioned the eight sustainable objectives of agritourism, objectives which ensure the connection between agritourism as a “smart” tool for ensuring sustainability of mountainous rural areas [7]:

- Protect, qualify and enhance the specific resources of each territory;
- Promoting the maintenance of human activities in rural areas;
- Favor multifunctionality in agriculture and the differentiation of agricultural incomes; encourage initiatives to protect the soil, the territory and the environment by agricultural entrepreneurs while increasing company incomes and improving the quality of life;
- Recover the rural building heritage by protecting the landscape peculiarities;
- Support and encourage typical products, quality products and related food and wine traditions;
- Promoting rural culture and food education; promoting agricultural and forestry development.

The characteristics of the provincial territory and the particularities of Trentino’s agriculture favor the spread of this form of hospitality, which is a valid way to integrate the income of the agricultural enterprise, especially in the marginal areas. In the Province of Trento, as in other Italian provinces, the reduction of the number of adherents of the old manner of agricultural production, and the closure of many small livestock farms in peripheral areas, increase part-time agricultural activities, but the constant abandonment of difficult areas leads to a reduction in the area cultivated with negative consequences on the environment and the landscape. For these reasons, the development of the agritourism activity finds a lot of support among the authorities. Agritourism is a tourist offer for those who appreciate the rural environment with natural, cultural, historical resources and gastronomic traditions.

The legislative system requires that the products obtained in the farm to register more than 40% from those used for the preparation of the meal. Another 40% must be procured from the rural area, so the complementarity of this activity is guaranteed.

The special tourist potential of this area is fully exploited through agritourism activities, as it is presented in Figure 2, at the base of this statement being the number of existing structures, knowing a higher growth in the number of establishments [8,58–60]. The territorial distribution of agritourism structures is not homogeneous: 22% are found in the Val di Non area (where from a historical point of view, this form of accommodation has started to develop), a proportion of 19% is found in Val d’Adige, 14% is concentrated in the Valli di Fiemme, Fassa and Primiero area, 13% in Valsugana, 10% in Vallagarina, and 32% is found in small percentages in the other areas.

The agri-food and handicraft sector can be considered tools of agritourism development. In this context, there is the problem of rediscovering the heritage of rural areas, an important role belonging to the rural population, which must be involved in capitalizing on specific local products, a goal that is achieved in the case of the Province of Trento. Due to the love for the land, for their work, and at the request of the guests who are eager to take home the products of agricultural holdings capitalized by agritourism, producers have joined behind the label, “AGRITUR TRENINO” to better capitalize their processed products, directly from the farm. The products under the auspices of the brand are: cheese, meat, wine, honey, various herbs, yogurt, jam, olive oil, etc. Local products are an important principle of the development of the local economy. The following ways of capitalizing on traditional products in the province of Trentino are taken into consideration: serving meals within the household, selling fresh products from the household, tasting products on the farm, with the possibility given to tourists to buy the agri-food products, no matter if they stay there or are in transit.

According to local specifications, the agricultural product capitalized through agritourism must own 70% from the initial product that is produced in the farm and to be accomplished directly by its members. Thus, from the existing structures, a percentage of 40% is oriented towards the administration of food and beverages, under the auspices of the brand “AGRITUR TRENINO”, being distributed as follows: Valli di Fiemme, Fassa and Primiero (29%), Val d’Adige (23%), Valsugana (13%), Val di Non

and Val di Sole (9% each), Valli Giudicarie (7%), and the rest is distributed in small percentages in the other areas.

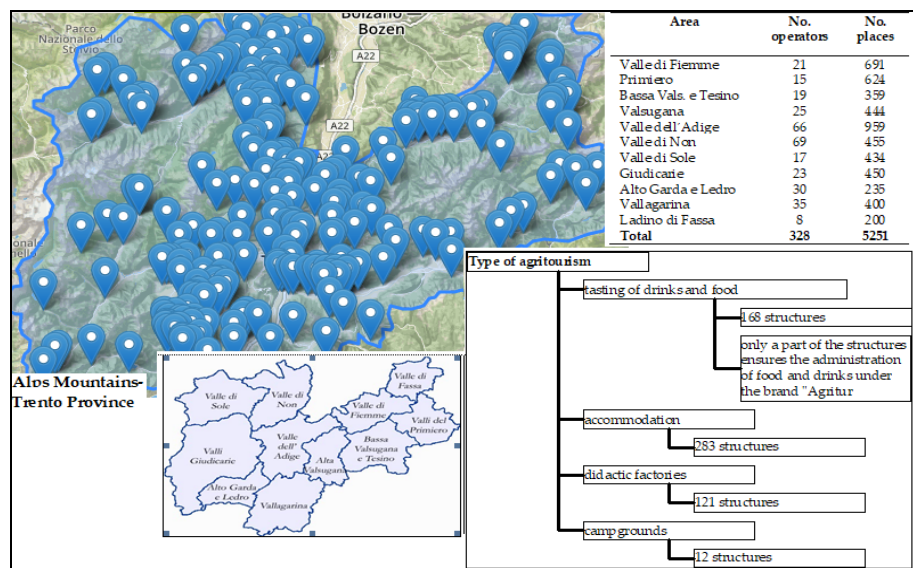


Figure 2. Distribution of agritourism structures from Alps Mountains-Trento Province. Source: Processing after www.agriturismotrentino.it [61].

The second area subject to analysis is the Romanian area of the Apuseni Mountains, an area that holds 7% of the country's territory and is spread on the area of six counties, as it is presented in Figure 3. The tourist areas from the Apuseni Mountains are grouped into 15 areas, each with certain specific features: Vadul Crisului Area, Meziad Area, Padis-Cetatile Ponorului Area, Aleu Valley Area, Iad Valley, Stana de Vale Area, Izbucul Calugari Karst Area, Baisoara Mountain Area, Gilau-Tarnita Area, Belis-Fantanele Area, Ighiu Valey Area, Ampoi Valey Area, Codru-Moma Mountains Area, Gurahont-Halmagiu Depression Area, Aries Valley Area.

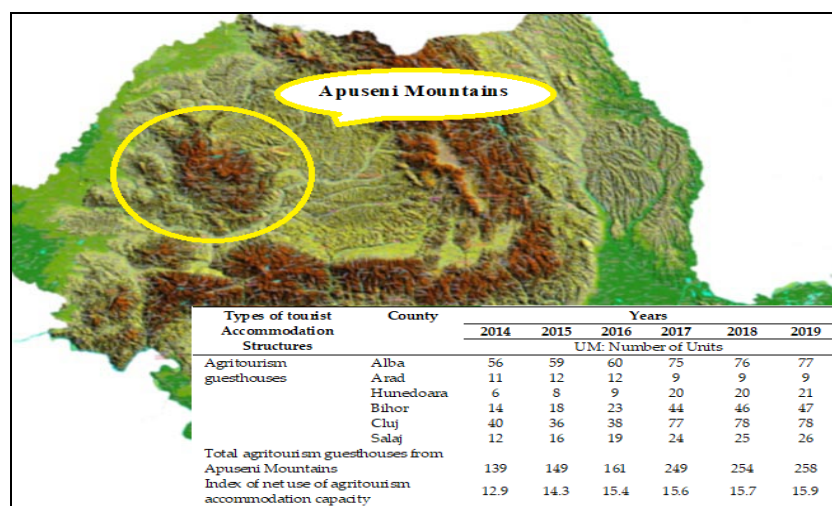


Figure 3. Apuseni Mountains—distribution in the territory and the evolution of agritourism structures. Source: Processing data from the National Institute of Statistics, <http://statistici.insse.ro>, consulted on 4 February 2020 [62,63].

This second area of analysis is distinguished by a high rural character, highlighted by the large number of communes and villages: 163 communes and 1253 villages. This second region, is “younger”

from capitalization of its resources through agritourist activities, but at an international level, it is recognized as “one of the 20 most beautiful tourist destinations” [49]. At the same time, it is an area that calls for the future initiative, together with a challenge to use agritourism resources as a “smart tool” for sustaining its sustainability [4,64].

The rural specificity of the Apuseni Mountains area, subject to the study, is distinguished through a series of potential elements, briefly presented in Figure 4, but also through some weaknesses.

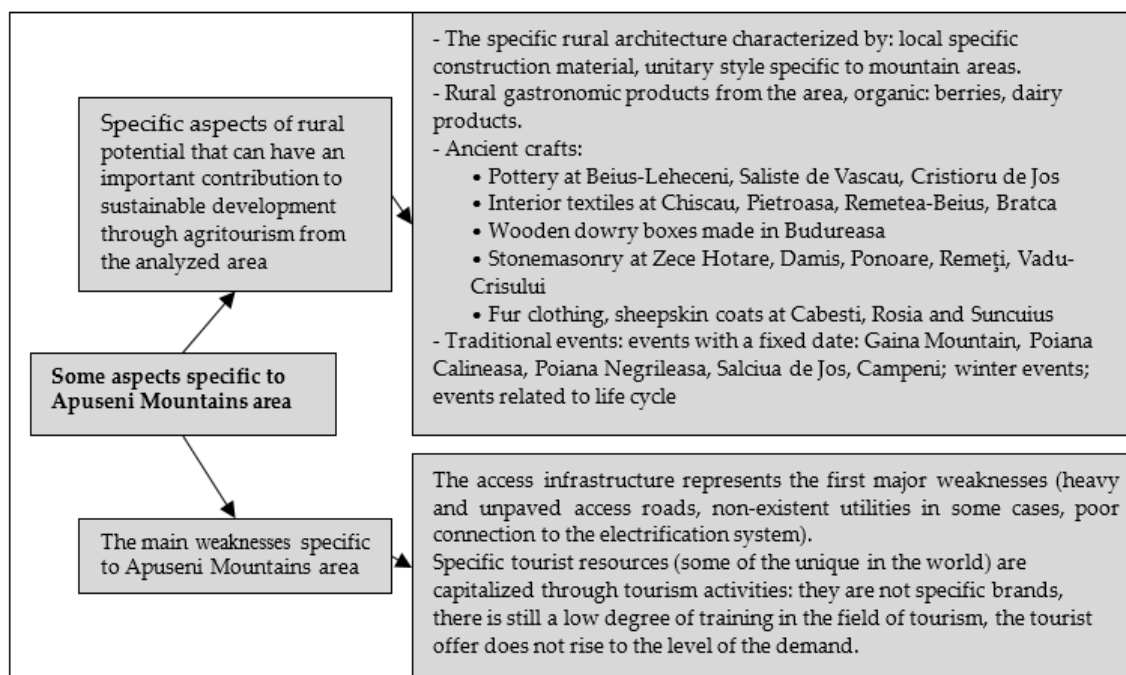


Figure 4. Apuseni Mountains area—highlighting specific aspects.

Additionally, in Apuseni Mountains area, agriculture represents an old occupation of the inhabitants, as it is evidenced by the role it has played over time. Mountain agriculture has been and still is the main source of food security, even if the agricultural farms from this area are small, and have rudimentary equipment that does not ensure a minimum of efficiency. The approach to agriculture in this area must be done from at least two points of view:

- As food suppliers and as the main source of ensuring the existence of the population;
- As an activity that absorbs the available labor force.

The agricultural area represents only 50.4% from the total area and it is below the national average of the share of agricultural area in the total area, which is almost 62%.

There are a number of problems related to the correct capitalization of the products specific to the area from the tourist’s point of view. The synthesis elements that reflect the aspects related to the capitalization of the agricultural production, crafts and other products specific to the area, lead to the following considerations:

- Private producers in the area agree to sell products directly from the household, being motivated by the lack of taxation for the sale of goods in different market segments;
- There is no organized network for processing the specific products of the area that would interest the producer and thus create its own network based on cooperation;
- The village does not represent certain offers able to direct the specific products towards modern forms of processing and commercialization through which to stimulate the producing inhabitants.

The conclusion obtained is that the area is characterized by an accentuated poverty, especially the rural areas, and one of the causes of this state of affairs is the insufficient valorization of the resources

of the area—tourism, respectively, agritourism being one of the growth solutions of the locals' income from the areas rich in tourist resources.

Referring to the total tourist structures, the second analyzed area owns approximately 12.5% from the existing tourist base at the national level. Apuseni Mountains has a material base with agritourism specific, represented by a number of 258 agritourism structures, at the level of 2019. During the period 2014–2019, it is observed, in Figure 3, an increase of the total number of agritourism structures. There can be noticed an increase of the agritourism guesthouses during the analyzed period from the Apuseni Mountains, holding a share of 9.74% from the total number of existing agritourism structures from the country. From the point of view of the degree of use of the agritourism accommodation structures, there is also an increase, reaching 15.9% in 2019. There are some similarities between the two areas but also, there are some differences, illustrated in Figure 5.

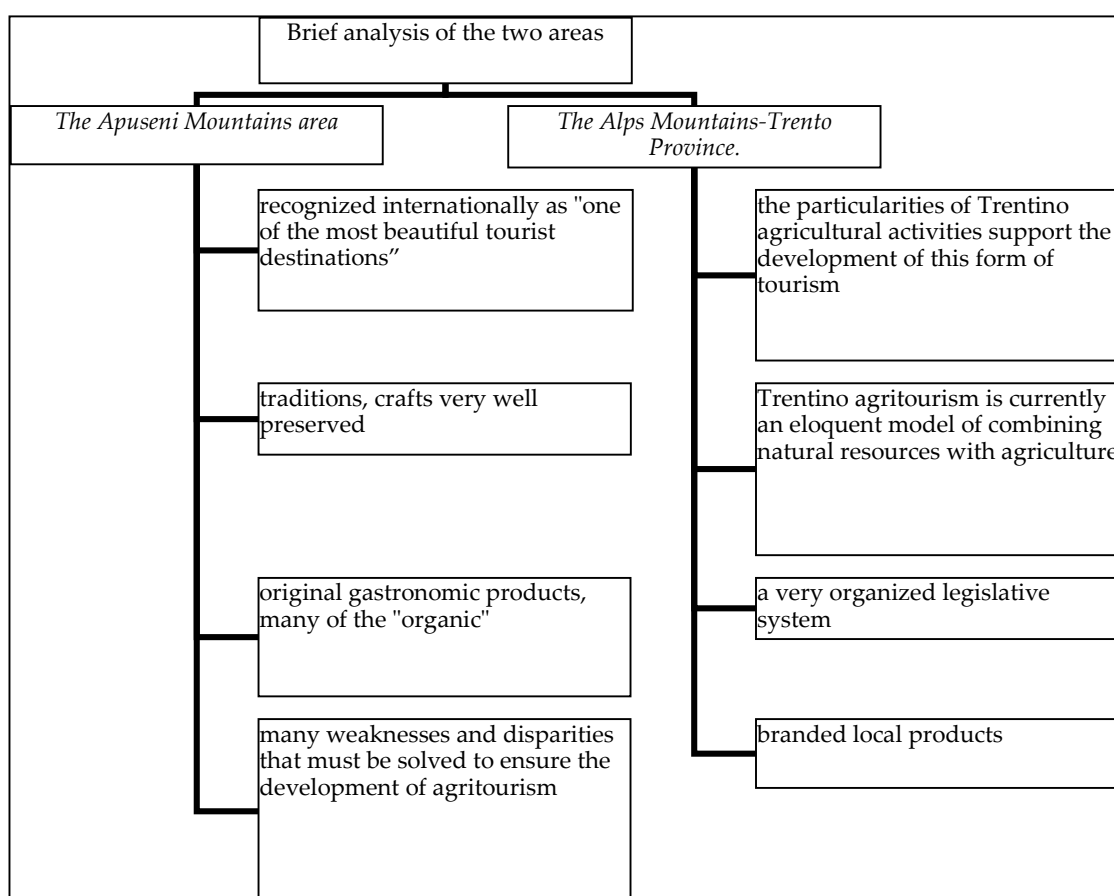


Figure 5. Brief analysis of the two areas—the main differences.

3.2. Determination of the Extent in Which Agritourism Activity, from the Two Areas, Is Considered a Possibility of Own Economic Growth and Development by the Owners

In order to determine the extent in which agritourism activity is considered, and a possibility of own economic growth and development by the owners of agritourist structures from the two areas, we have used a questionnaire, as we stated above in the research methodology. Therefore, a set of research questions was defined, having as topics: the characteristics of the owners of agritourism structures; the motivations of agritourism farmers for carrying out agritourism activity and how they understand/see their agritourism activity; some factors for supporting agritourism activity in the two areas; the extent in which agritourism activity, from the two areas, is considered by the owners, a possibility of own economic growth and development; the management strategies to support the improvement of the agritourism activity/product so as to transform agritourism in a "smart tool" for

sustainable development of the local community, the role of agritourism activity as a future “smart tool” for supporting rural innovation and territorial development.

3.2.1. Identifying the Characteristics of the Agritourism Structures’ Owners, from the Two Areas: Alps Mountains-Trento Province and Apuseni Mountains

From the data illustrated in Table 2, it can be observed that, at the level of both regions subject to analysis, there are a total number of 586 agritourism structures, 328 in the Alps Mountains-Trento Province and 258 in the Apuseni Mountains.

Table 2. The characteristics of owners of agritourism structures, from Alps Mountains-Trento Province and Apuseni Mountains.

Studied Region	Measure Unit	Men	Women	Statistical Centralization	
				No. of Questionnaires	% from Total No. of Structures from the Area
Alps Mountains-Trento Province	No.	78	41	119	36.28
	%	65.54	34.45		
Apuseni Mountains	No.	87	55	142	55.03
	%	61.26	38.73		

From this total number of agritourism structures, presented in Table 2, a total of 261 agritourism structures were questioned, summing up a percentage of 44.53% from the total number of existing agritourism structures in both areas. From the Alps Mountains-Trento Province area, 119 owners of agritourism structures were surveyed, out of the 328 existing ones, 65.54% being male, and 34.45% being female. From the Apuseni Mountains area, a number of 142 owners of agritourism structures were surveyed, 61.26% being men and 38.73% being women.

3.2.2. Identification of the Manner in Which Owners Understand Agritourism and their Motivation for Carrying out this Activity

Over the world, including the two areas subject to comparison, there are tourist structures in rural areas that capitalize specific rural resources through tourism, but not all of them are considered agritourism structures. The impact of agritourism activities on sustaining the rural environment is an important aspect, and in our view, this aspect is well analyzed from the perspective of understanding the owners’ motivation for agritourism and the manner they achieve to carry out this activity (Table 3).

Table 3. The manner in which owners understand agritourism and their motivations for carrying out the activity.

Studied Region	Measure Unit	The Understanding of Agritourism Activity (a)		Owners’ Motivations for Carrying Out Agritourism Activity (b)			
		Yes	No	A New Lifestyle	Additional Income/Autonomy	Providing Jobs	Increasing the Value of the Farm
Alps Mountains- Trento Province	No.	102	17	32	16	29	42
	%	85.71	14.28	26.89	13.44	24.37	25.29
Apuseni Mountains	No.	51	91	7	54	33	48
	%	35.91	64.08	4.93	38.03	23.23	33.80

Analyzing the aspects presented in Table 3, for the first aspects followed, respectively, *the understanding of agritourism activity*, we can see that in the case of the Italian area, 85.71% of the agritourism structures’ owners surveyed know the particularities of agritourism activity, while in the case of the Romanian area, only 35.91% of the surveyed owners make the distinction between rural tourist activities and agritourism activities. For the Romanian area, the ignorance of the aspects that differentiate the rural tourist activities from the agritourism ones is a negative aspect that is reflected in the constitution of the agritourist product. Conversely, in the Italian area, the knowledge

of the particularities of the agritourism activities is a strong point which, we believe, derives from the clear specification in the legislation of this country [2] of the defining aspects that regulate the agritourism activity.

The second objective pursued in Table 3, namely *the motivations of owners for carrying out agritourism activity* is, in our view, an important aspect to pursue and analyze; the purpose being to identify the main motivations for the development of agritourism activity in the two areas subject to comparison. Thus, in the case of the Italian area, the owners of agritourism structures have as main motivations of the development of this activity, “a new lifestyle, combining agriculture with human relations”, 26.89%, and “increasing the value of the farm through own efforts”, 25.29%, to the detriment of purely economic motivations, these being present by 13.44%, or social ones of the type “conducting the activity with the family/possibility of providing jobs for family members”, 24.37%. The Romanian area reveals somehow different aspects. Thus, the owners of the agritourism structures have declared, in proportion of 38.03%, that they are motivated by “the generation of additional income/autonomy” to carry out the agritourism activity, therefore, the most important are the economic motivations in the region. A possible explanation derives, perhaps, from the more precarious economic situation of this area. Similarly to the Italian area, in second place in the top of the motivations underlying the development of agritourism activity, at the level of the Romanian area, it is “the increasing value of the farm through own efforts” with 33.80%. The explanation derives, perhaps, from the relatively young age of the entrepreneurs in this field, but also from the fact that most of the entrepreneurs in this field have as basic/main economic activity, the agritourism activity, especially in the case of the Romanian area. The social motivation, “conducting the activity with the family/possibility of providing jobs for family members”, is the third most important in the eyes of entrepreneurs in the field of agritourism in the Apuseni Mountains, representing 23.23% from the total responses from this area.

3.2.3. Identification of the Aspects Related to the Capitalization of the Two Locations through Agritourism Activities

The success of the agritourism activity is the one that motivates the entrepreneurs from the areas analyzed by us, but it is also the beginning of the appearance of sustainability problems of this activity, or the idea of “smart chance” for rural areas of the two mountain environments. The factors that we took into account are: specialized training for agritourism activity, the existence of tourist and access infrastructure, and the dimension and approach of the agricultural activity developed by the owners through the dimension of the farm (Table 4).

Table 4. The development degree of agritourism activity taking into consideration training, infrastructure and the extension of the farm.

Studied Region	Measure Unit	Specialized Training for Agritourism Activity (a)		The Existence of Tourist and Access Infrastructure (b)		Dimension and Approach of the Agricultural Activity Developed by the Owner by the Dimension of the Farm (c)		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	5.00–10.00 ha	10.00–20.00 ha	20.00–30.00 ha
Alps Mountains-Trento Province	No.	48	71	104	15	24	73	22
	%	40.33	59.66	87.39	12.60	20.16	61.34	18.49
Apuseni Mountains	No.	44	98	45	97	103	32	7
	%	30.98	69.01	31.69	68.31	72.53	22.53	4.93

The first factor analyzed in Table 4 refers to the existence of a specialized training for agritourism activity. We take into account here either agricultural studies or studies focused on tourism/agritourism, but also some special training courses strictly on the agritourism field. At the level of the Italian area, from the total number of surveyed owners, 40.33% have carried out agrarian studies, or strictly focused on tourism, or have some courses on agritourism, but most of them have studied in other fields of activity than agritourism. The situation is somehow similar for the Romanian area, therefore, the percentage of those who do not have higher education in agriculture or tourism and do not have

specialized courses in agritourism is higher, namely 69.01%, than of those with higher education on the field, namely 30.98%. The conclusion drawn is that, in the case of both areas, entrepreneurs did not prepare in advance for this activity, the opportunity for the emergence and development of agritourism activity appeared after the development of agricultural activity as an alternative to it or as a way of increasing the value of the agricultural farm through own efforts and other activities, or has derived from the position advantage of some areas with high tourist potential. Consequently, we argue that for a certain percentage of agritourism entrepreneurs in both areas, the emergence of agritourism activity meant starting a new professional career, not diversifying of the agricultural existent one.

The second factor analyzed in Table 4, refers to the existence of tourist and access infrastructure. Tourist infrastructure and access infrastructure are two factors that can support or stop the agritourism activity. In the two areas subject to study and comparison, we can see the major difference, and at the same time, the degree of economic and tourist development of each area. We can observe that the economic and tourism development degree is higher in the Italian area, being highlighted by the presence of access and tourism infrastructure of 87.39% of the owners of agritourism structures. Only 12.60% of the owners signal difficulties in carrying out the agritourism activity, referring mainly to the infrastructure necessary for the leisure. At the opposite pole is the Romanian area, where the existence of tourist and access infrastructure is reported only by 31.69% of owners of agritourism units. The vast majority, respectively, 68.31% of those surveyed, report the lack of tourist and access infrastructure.

The third factor, analyzed in Table 4, refers to the dimension and approach of the agricultural activity developed by the owners considering the dimensions of the farm. Additionally, from this point of view, we can observe the differences in development between the two rural mountain areas subjected to our study. Thus, in the case of the Italian area, we are talking about large surfaces of agritourism farms, most of those surveyed (approximately 70%), falling into the category of 10–20 hectares, 61.34%, or 20–30 hectares, 18.49%, meaning a certain possibility of ensuring an economic viability as a farmer first. This aspect reveals a “good practice” of this activity, or a development of it “like a book”, meaning as a complementary activity to the agricultural activities, not as a substitute for them. The Romanian area is again at the opposite pole. From those surveyed, a large share of 72.53% own a small farm, with areas between 5–10 hectares, most of which being characterized by a strong fragmentation of these lands, not being able to ensure economic viability through agricultural activity. Therefore, there are many who started first as agritourism entrepreneurs and then as farmers, and not the other way around, as it is normal. Only a small part of those surveyed, 22.53%, have an agritourism farm with areas between 10–20 hectares, being able to ensure some economic viability, but many of them also have problems with technical equipment. Only 4.93% of those surveyed have more than 20 hectares.

3.2.4. Identification of the Aspects Related to the Extent in which Agritourism Activity Is Considered by the Owners a Possibility of Own Economic Growth and Development

As we stated that the purpose of our work is to highlight the importance of agritourism activity for rural mountain areas, and to propose agritourism activity as a “smart chance” for mountain rural environment’s sustainability, an important aspect pursued is referring to identifying aspects related to the extent in which agritourism activity is considered a possibility of own economic growth and development by the owners (Table 5).

In the attempt to propose agritourism as a “smart chance” for mountain rural environment’s sustainability, we wanted to see first whether it is or it is not considered a possibility of own economic growth and development by the owners of agritourist structures. In the case of the Italian areas, 76.46% of those surveyed consider that agritourism was, for them, a development possibility, both from a personal point of view and also a way for the diversification and increase in the farm incomes. In the case of the Romanian area, only 47.88% of the owners of agritourism structures see agritourism as a way of development.

Table 5. Identifying aspects related to the extent in which agritourism activities are considered a possibility of own economic growth and development by the owners.

Studied Region	Measure Unit	Is or Is Not Agritourism Activity a Possibility of Own Economic Development (a)		The Capitalization of Own Products Obtained in the Farm (b)		Identification of the Extent in Which the Strengths/Traditional Crafts/Rural Activities Existing in Two Areas Are Used in Creating the Agritourist Product (c)			
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Use of the Strengths/Resources of the Area	Use of Rural Activities Specific to Life in Mountain Region	Use of the Local/Own Products/Gastronomy	Use of the Traditional Crafts or Local Customs
Alps Mountains-Trento Province	No. %	91 76.46	28 23.53	25 21.01	94 78.98	22 18.49	38 31.93	41 34.45	18 15.12
Apuseni Mountains	No. %	68 47.88	74 52.11	117 82.39	25 17.60	70 49.29	15 10.56	41 28.87	16 11.27

The next aspect analyzed was the *identification of the extent in which the strengths/traditional crafts/rural activities existent in two areas were used in creating the agritourist product*. In order to be a “smart” future proposal for sustaining mountain rural areas, to link the components of sustainability, and having many socio-economic advantages, in the future, it must:

- Firstly, to remain a secondary activity to agriculture, not to replace it, having as purpose to revitalize unprofitable activities, by capitalizing through tourism activities their own products and rural activities specific to life in mountain regions;
- Then, to use, in creating the agritourist product, all strengths/resources of the area, traditional crafts or local customs, focusing on educating tourists to enjoy the life on mountain rural farms.

Taking into consideration these aspects, the Italian area uses local/own products/gastronomy, in proportion of 34.45% for obtaining the agritourist product, then rural activities specific to life in mountain region, in proportion of 31.93%, respecting thus the principles mentioned above. In case of the second area analyzed, the Romanian one, there are used the strengths/resources of the area in proportion of 49.29% for obtaining the agritourist product, then the local/own products/gastronomy, in proportion of 28.87%, from where it is possible to observe the character of “beginners” in agritourism activity. In the case of capitalizing on these products through agritourism, the Romanian area still has work to do, especially in the marketing of these products in a different way than through food at the pension.

3.2.5. Identification of Some Management Strategies to Support the Improvement of the Agritourism Activity/Product, so as to Transform Agritourism into a “Smart Tool”

Some management strategies to support the localities with high potential, and consistent parts of the two areas studied, are adequate for capitalizing traditional resources and local own products through agritourism, so as to transform agritourism into a “smart tool” for alternative income sources and sustainable development of the local communities [65,66]. Therefore, in Table 6, issues regarding the involvement for supporting agritourism activities from specific local authorities and some strategies necessary to support the development of the agritourism activity/product are analyzed, so as to transform them into a “smart tool” for alternative income sources.

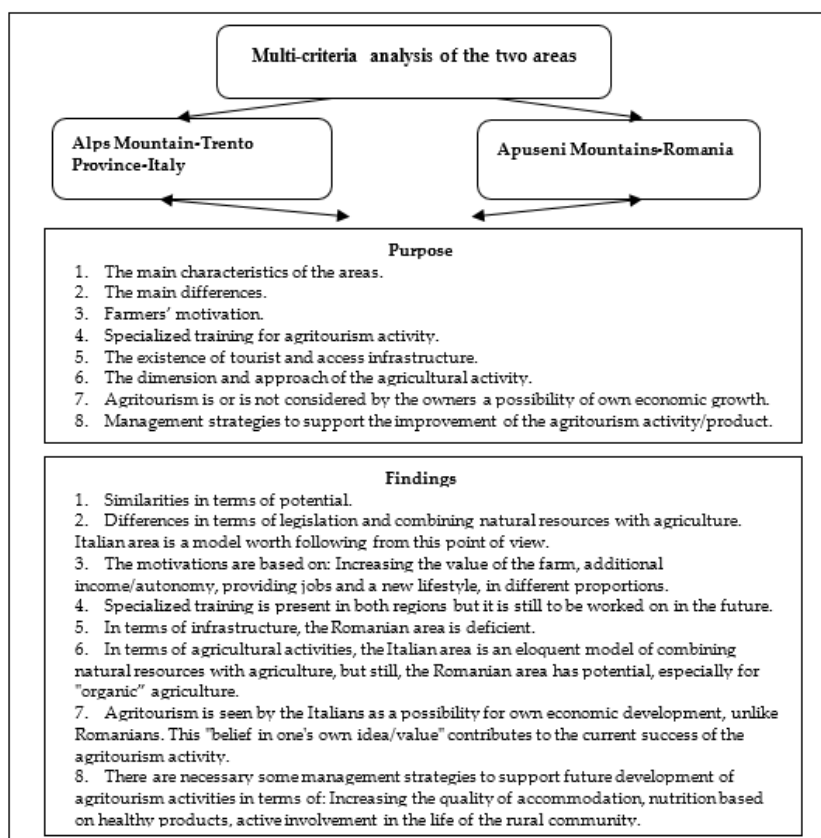
Regarding *the involvement of the local authorities*, those from the Italian area note favorably the involvement of the authorities, in 85.71% of the cases, while in the Romanian area, it is highlighted, once again, the “youth” of this field of activity, through the fact that the owners see the involvement of the authorities in a lower percent, only 33.09%. It illustrates that the importance of this activity for the sustainability of the mountainous rural environment is not an important aspect. However, there are a number of measures taken by local entrepreneurs with an impact on supporting agritourism: increasing the visibility of agritourism structures through road signaling; ensuring some support (financial or consulting); support for establishing/creating of the agritourism structures.

Table 6. Identifying the involvement of the local authorities and some strategies necessary for transforming agritourism activity/product into a “smart tool” for ensuring sustainability.

Studied Region	Measure Unit	The Involvement for Supporting Agritourism Activities from Specific Local Authorities			Management Strategies Necessary for Supporting the Future Development of Agritourism Activity/Product		
		Yes	No	Some Actions	Increasing the Quality of Accommodation (1)	Nutrition Based on Healthy Products (2)	Active Involvement in the Life of the Rural Community (3)
Alps Mountains-Trento Province	No.	102	17	Increasing the visibility of agritourism structures through road signaling Ensuring some support (financial or consulting)	17	49	53
	%	85.71	14.28		14.28	41.17	44.54
Apuseni Mountains	No.	47	95	Support for establishing/creating of the agritourism structures	54	51	37
	%	33.09	66.90		38.03	35.91	26.05

Regarding some strategies necessary to support the improvement of agritourism so as to transform it into a “smart tool” for ensuring sustainability, those from the Italian area rely on a future development of the active involvement in the life of the rural community in proportion of 44.54%, on nutrition considering healthy products in proportion of 41.17%, and on increasing the quality of accommodation in proportion of 14.28%. In the case of the Romanian area, the slower degree of development is observed again. Here, the entrepreneurs rely, for the purpose of future development, on increasing the quality of the tourist service by improving accommodation in proportion of 38.03, by emphasizing on healthy food/products in proportion of 35.91%, leaving the leisure part in the last place, with a share in the total answers of 26.05%.

There are some similarities between the two areas in terms of potential, also in terms of the desire to increase value of the farm, shown in Table 5, and the existence of a specialized training for this type of activity presented in Table 4. For both areas, agritourism is a way for capitalization of their own products obtained in the farm, observed in Table 5, but also differences, shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** Multi-criteria analysis of the two areas—purpose and findings.

4. Discussion

Currently, small mid-scale farmers from rural mountain areas, facing many difficulties, with highly unstable income from agricultural activities due to the appeared changes, have oriented to a wide range of adjustments [67], and other activities, among these new activities being agritourism. The agritourism activity has increased during the last years, all over the world. One of the reasons is the difficulty of obtaining consistent income only from agricultural activities, especially in the mountainous rural areas. Promoting the idea of the development of agritourism activity sustains the intra-extra farm diversification, and allows farmers to react to the constraints generated by modern times [68], while using rural mountain resources to ensure farm's pluriactivity, as a "smart chance" for alternative income sources [69].

In the context in which sustainability has become very important in the last decades, especially when we refer to rural mountain areas, our purpose is to highlight that agritourism activity can be a "smart chance" for this area's sustainability, because it can link some important aspects:

- It connects agricultural activities with tourism ones (namely agricultural production, procession activities with the elements of tourist product: accommodation, food and leisure). Tourism activity must be developed as a complementary activity to agriculture, and it should not become a substitute for this.
- It combines all agricultural resources from the rural mountain areas, and resources of the farm, with natural resources, cultural resources, and also with rural community traditions, which can be a starting point to create agritourist products, with multiple benefits.

Therefore, in order to ensure the sustainability of rural mountain area agritourism, it can be a "smart" solution, and a necessary one, because in the future, the smart tourism will play a role in global competitiveness and integration of local rural businesses in the framework of the mountain rural localities. In these regards, some of the future priorities for rural areas, regarding agritourism activity's evolution, we consider as opportune some priorities and measures so as to be a "smart tool" for the local community's development, presented in Table 7. Through agritourism services, sustainable solutions for rural structures are offered: an ally in supporting agriculture, stopping abandonment of rural peasant houses, and protection of the rural art of traditional crafts by "educating" the inhabitants to practice them for the sake of tourists.

The sustainability acquired by the mountainous rural environment through agritourism can have a multiplier effect, with economic and social benefits on the social life of the community [70–72]:

- Rural entrepreneurs have the possibility to capitalize directly their agricultural production; in this way, obtaining direct additional income, and stopping the land abandonment [73,74];
- Rural entrepreneurs have the possibility to use traditional activities existent in the mountain rural communities, sustaining, in this way, the revival and continuous practice of these ancestral activities and supporting their preservation;
- The possibility to improve the relationship between urban versus rural by "smart" using/capitalizing rural products/resources through tourism, stopping the chaotic development and sustaining the capitalization of representative features of rural mountain areas; in this way, encouraging urban citizens to visit and to love rural areas;
- More attention on the environment, meaning the "raw material" for agritourism, by supporting the preservation of the viability and stability of rural mountain localities, by creating ways of diversifying rural economies of rural areas through eco-agriculture, crafts and traditions through a "smart" tourism.

Table 7. Specific priorities and measures proposed for the improvement of the agritourism activity/product as to be a “smart tool” for the local community’s development.

General Objective	Specific priorities	Measures Proposed to Achieve the Established Priorities
Agritourism activity—a “smart chance” for mountain rural environment’s sustainability	<i>Understanding the mean of agritourism activity</i>	Carrying out information campaigns regarding the possibility of practicing agritourism activity highlighting its main advantages Specialized training for agritourism activity Establishing by law the characteristics and limits of the agritourism activity
	<i>Highlighting the motivations of owners for carrying out agritourism activity</i>	Identification of the main resources and traditional products possible to be capitalized through agritourism Creating a partnership with producers from rural areas Creating training programs at local level to include traditional resources and products in tourist circuit
	<i>The involvement of the local authorities in supporting agritourism activities</i>	Increasing the visibility of agritourism structures through road signaling Ensuring some support (financial or consulting) Support for establishing/creating of the agritourism structures Technical assistance for the preparation of the necessary documentation
	<i>Proper management strategies</i>	Increasing the quality of accommodation The incorporation in the agritourism product of the “way of life specific to community” Capitalization of healthy food (obtained from own production, or from nature) directly through agritourism/agritourism product
	<i>Accent on promoting this activity</i>	Establishing directions for promotion and framing them in a unitary framework Promotion by achieving: - tourist guides; - flyers; - websites and advertisements.

Source: Processing and interpretation according to the conclusion of the research.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to study the particularities of agritourism activity, as an actual or future opportunity for ensuring sustainability of rural mountain areas. The manner in which we choose to support its utility, or the “smart chance” for rural mountain area of this activity, is through the comparison of two areas, both with tourist potential, but with different degrees of development of this activity and obviously, with a differentiated approach: Apuseni Mountains area and Alps Mountain-Trento Province. Determination of the extent in which agritourism activity is considered a possibility of own economic growth and development by the owners is one of the main aspects pursued and the main conclusions drawn are expressed in the following:

1. Identification of the motivations of farmers for carrying out agritourism activity, and how they understand/see the agritourism activity. From this point of view, in the case of the Italian area, the ecological motivation through which agritourism is seen as, “a new lifestyle, combining agriculture with human relations”, is the most important, supporting somehow the sustainability of this activity for the mountainous rural environment. In the second analyzed area, the Romanian one, the ecological motivation through which agritourism is seen as, “a new lifestyle, combining agriculture with human relations”, is the least important, the explanation deriving from the fact that in this area, the agritourism activity is at the beginning, and its profitability—the incomes obtained from this activity being lower—therefore, the accent on the sustainability is also much lower. Starting from here, a first proposal derives, which, for the Romanian area that is less consolidated on the agritourism market, may represent a “smart chance” for this activity, namely: focus on defining by law the agritourism activity, and also establishing the stages and objectives of this activity for rural entrepreneurs (Tables 3 and 7 as proposals).
2. Identification of the aspects for supporting the capitalization of the two areas through agritourism activities is another studied aspect. So, we find that rural entrepreneurs do not prepare in advance for developing this activity, and they perceive it as a way of increasing the value of the agricultural

farm through their own efforts and other activities. If, in the case of the Italian area, referring to the lack of infrastructure, we discuss only the infrastructure needed for the leisure part; in the case of the Romanian area, we discuss especially about the lack of access infrastructure and then about the one necessary for the developing tourist activity. Therefore, even if from the point of view of the agritourism potential, the two mountainous rural areas are comparable, from the point of view of the degree of development of the agritourism activity, there are major differences of development. Regarding the dimension and approach of the agricultural activity developed by the owner, we also find some differences between the two areas:

- Italian area has a large dimension of the farm, ensuring, in this way, an economic viability—first, as farmers, and then, as entrepreneurs in agritourist activity,
 - Romanian area is at the opposite pole, the entrepreneurs start the agritourism activity and then the agricultural one, and not the other way around as it is normal (Tables 4 and 7 as proposals).
3. Identification of some aspects, related to the extent in which agritourism activity is viewed as a possibility of own economic growth and development, is the third aspect pursued. Consequently, we discover that agritourism activity is a “smart chance” for rural mountain Italian area, and it can be a possible lever to combat many existing disparities from Romanian area. In the creation process of agritourism product, both areas put, in the second place, the use of the local/own products/gastronomy. Making a comparison between the two areas, the findings reveal that:
- in the case of the Italian area, we find specialized, diversified and quantitatively higher production, obtained in farms with large dimensions (economically speaking),
 - in the case of the Romanian area, the products are obtained mostly in small farms, of semi-subsistence, but the owners have an advantage: *many of these products are organic*. The conclusion that emerges is that both areas try to include the specific features that characterize each area in the agritourism product, trying through different means to differentiate themselves from other tourist destinations (Table 5).
4. To support the localities with high potential from the two analyzed areas, a series of strategies identified by local owners of agritourist structures are necessary: Increasing the visibility of agritourist structures through road signaling; ensuring some support (financial or consulting); support for establishing/creating of the agritourism structures (Tables 6 and 7 as proposals).

As a conclusion, we state that for the Italian mountain area brought into discussion, agritourism represents the “smart chance” in which rural areas need support and, at the same time, to sustain its economic and social viability, need local rural entrepreneurs from this area. All the natural resources are used by the Italians intelligently to promote and sustain the rural area through agritourism.

The second area, the Romanian one, comparable in potential with the Italian one, is still at the beginning of the road, from an agritourism point of view, and is facing some major disparities. This area could use the Italian experience in agritourism field, as a “smart sustainable chance” to solve many of its disparities and problems, especially in the current context. For this mountain area, agritourism activity could be the “smart sustainable chance”, because it comes as one of the solutions to deal with the appeared constraints, while focusing on the specific resources and bringing economic and social benefits, together with putting the accent on resources, tourist wishes, the ideas of local tourism entrepreneurs, local authorities, appropriate management strategies and modern technologies (Table 7 as proposals).

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