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SOME OPINIONS ABOUT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPORTANCE AND RESULTS OF AGRITOURISM (ON THE EXAMPLE OF GEORGIA)

Abstract: *The author's discussion in the article focuses on the importance of agritourism and the main aspects of its positive socio-economic results. Tourism in Georgia is considered one of the important parts of the country's development strategy. Agritourism, as a tourist destination, means serving visitors who are interested in studying agricultural activities, getting to know the features and traditions of rural life. It is true that today Georgia is one of the attractive tourist destinations, but it has the potential to become interesting also in the field of agrotourism. The purpose of the research is to determine what positive results the development of agrotourism can bring for the country and its regions.*

The author of the article believes that in the post-Covid period, the Georgian tourist and hotel business is working under conditions of increased demand for their services. However, the number of people living in rural areas has significantly decreased in Georgia. Unemployment and low wages are a problem in a number of areas. In such conditions, it is an important issue to raise the awareness of the local population about agritourism in terms of their employment and improvement of their living standards.

Based on the results of the research, the author believes that for the development of agritourism, it is necessary to implement a number of changes in rural areas in those regions that have a great potential for the development of agritourism.

The importance of agritourism in promoting sustainable development and preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the village is great. This creates a win-win situation where both tourists and local residents benefit from the exchange of knowledge, experience and economic activities. Agritourism stimulates the local economy and will promote the development of small businesses.

Especially since there are additional contributing factors for the development of this direction in Georgia (for example, natural environmental factors in the regions, etc.), which will leave an impression on the guests and have a great impact on their satisfaction. And satisfied guests return to places of interest to them in the future and spread positive reviews. According to the author, the effective use of modern marketing approaches and social media marketing will increase the opportunities for the development of agritourism in Georgia. The positive result of which will be that the standard of living of the local population in rural areas will improve significantly. This will help to stop the population migration from rural to urban areas, it will become attractive for many people to live and work in rural areas.

Keywords: Agritourism, Agri-entertainment, Tourism and Hospitality Marketing, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Tourism

JEL classification: M30, M31, Q13, L83

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ზოგიერთი მოსაზრება აგროტურიზმის ეკონომიკური და სოციალური მნიშვნელობისა და შედეგების შესახებ (საქართველოს მაგალითზე)

აბსტრაქტი: სტატიაში ავტორის მსჯელობა ყურადღებას ამახვილებს აგროტურიზმის მნიშვნელობაზე და მისი დადებითი სოციალურ-ეკონომიკური შედეგების ძირითად ასპექტებზე. ტურიზმი საქართველოში განიხილება ქვეყნის განვითარების სტრატეგიის ერთ-ერთ მნიშვნელოვან ნაწილად. აგროტურიზმი, როგორც ტურისტული მიმართულება, გულისხმობს სტუმრების მომსახურებას, რომლებიც დაინტერესებულნი არიან სასოფლო-სამეურნეო საქმიანობის შესწავლით, სოფლის ცხოვრების თავისებურებებისა და ტრადიციების გაცნობით. დღეს საქართველო ერთ-ერთი მიმზიდველი ტურისტული დანიშნულების ადგილია და მას აქვს პოტენციური საინტერესო გახდეს აგროტურიზმის მიმართულებითაც. კვლევის მიზანია დადგინდეს, თუ რა დადებითი შედეგების მოტანა შეუძლია აგროტურიზმის განვითარებას ქვეყნისთვის და მისი რეგიონებისთვის. სტატიის ავტორი მიიჩნევს, რომ პოსტკოვიდ პერიოდში ტურისტული და სასტუმრო ბიზნესი საქართველოში მათ მომსახურებაზე გაზრდილი მოთხოვნის პირობებში მუშაობს.

თუმცა ისიც უნდა ითქვას, რომ ქვეყანაში საგრძნობლად შემცირდა სოფლად მცხოვრებთა რაოდენობა. უმუშევრობა და დაბალი ხელფასები პრობლემაა რიგ სფეროებში. ასეთ პირობებში მნიშვნელოვანი საკითხია ადგილობრივი მოსახლეობის ცნობიერების ამაღლება აგროტურიზმის შესახებ მათი დასაქმებისა და ცხოვრების დონის ამაღლების კუთხით. კვლევის შედეგებზე დაყრდნობით ავტორს მიაჩნია, რომ აგროტურიზმის განვითარებისთვის საჭიროა მთელი რიგი ცვლილებების განხორციელება სოფლად იმ რეგიონებში, რომლებსაც აქვთ მისი განვითარების პოტენციალი.

დიდია აგროტურიზმის მნიშვნელობა სოფლის მდგრადი განვითარების ხელშეწყობის, კულტურული და ბუნებრივი მემკვიდრეობის შენარჩუნებაში. ეს ქმნის ისეთ მდგომარეობას, როდესაც ტურისტებიც და ადგილობრივი მოსახლეობაც სარგებლობენ ცოდნის, გამოცდილების და ეკონომიკური აქტივობების გაცვლით. აგროტურიზმი მასტიმულირებელია ადგილობრივი ეკონომიკისათვის და ხელს შეუწყობს მცირე ბიზნესის განვითარებას.

მით უმეტეს, რომ საქართველოში ამ მხრივ არის დამატებითი ხელშეწყობი ფაქტორები (მაგალითად, ბუნებრივი გარემო ფაქტორები რეგიონებში და ა.შ.), რაც კარგ შთაბეჭდილებას დატოვებს სტუმრებზე და დიდ გავლენას მოახდენს მათ კმაყოფილებაზე. ხოლო კმაყოფილი სტუმრები მომავალში უბრუნდებიან მათთვის საინტერესო ადგილებს და ავრცელებენ დადებით შეფასებებს. ავტორის აზრით, თანამედროვე მარკეტინგული მიდგომებისა და სოციალური მედია მარკეტინგის ეფექტიანი გამოყენება გაზრდის

საქართველოში აგროტურიზმის განვითარების შესაძლებლობებს. რისი დადებითი შედეგიც იქნება სოფლად ადგილობრივი მოსახლეობის ცხოვრების დონის მნიშვნელოვანი გაუმჯობესება. ეს ხელს შეუწყობს მოსახლეობის მიგრაციის შეჩერებას სოფლიდან ქალაქებში, სოფლად ცხოვრება და მუშაობა კი მიმზიდველი გახდება ბევრი ადამიანისთვის.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: აგროტურიზმი, აგრო-გართობა, ტურიზმისა და მასპინძლობის მარკეტინგი, მდგრადი განვითარება, მდგრადი ტურიზმი

JEL კლასიფიკაცია: M30, M31, Q13, L83

INTRODUCTION

Resting people helps them to be more productive in their work and life. Travel and tourism play a big role in achieving this good goal. Georgia stood out among other republics in terms of tourism even in the Soviet past. which was facilitated by its natural attractiveness and variety of resorts (Seturi, 2018). Today travel and tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. It is a complex system, because its effective functioning is related to the activities of enterprises in various fields. The tourism market reflects consumer needs for various tourism products (Seturi, 2017). Tourists' satisfaction is determined by several factors at the same time. More attention should be paid to the development of sustainable tourism, which aims to reduce the resistance resulting from the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the host community.

Tourism in Georgia is considered one of the important parts of the country's development strategy. Undoubtedly that, the country has the potential to offer visitors a variety of tourism products. However, we should not ignore the aspects of sustainable development in order for the development to be both profitable and socially just and environmentally friendly. Therefore, a careful attitude towards the environment, rational use of cultural monuments and resources is necessary (Seturi, 2021; Seturi & Urotadze, 2020). Agritourism can play an important role in sustainable development. However, a significant part of the country's population is not aware of its possibilities.

Agritourism is a form of enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, or business owner. The importance of Agritourism in promoting sustainable development and preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the village is great. This creates a win-win situation where both tourists and local residents benefit from the exchange of knowledge, experience and economic activities. A number of terms are used to describe the concept of agritourism, including agritourism, farm tourism, farm holiday tourism, wine tourism and agri-entertainment. In general, these terms refer to all scales of farming enterprises and public events that show the traveler the activities and products of rural families and the agricultural heritage of farming regions. Agritourism stimulates the local economy and will promote the development of small businesses. In Georgia, there is a trend of increasing demand for agro-tourism products both from the country's population and foreigners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the data of the National Tourism Administration, 2,123,816 international visits took place in Georgia in the first two quarters of 2024. This indicator is 10% higher than the data

of the same period last year. According to the information of the agency responsible for the development of tourism, a special increase of tourists from the European Union and the Persian Gulf countries, as well as new tourist markets, India and China can be observed. According to the report of the National Tourism Administration, in the first six months of this year, 183,355 visits from EU countries took place in Georgia, which is 10% higher than the figure of 2023. A particularly large increase comes from visits from France and amounts to 30.3%. International visits from Germany increased by 24.3% and from the United Kingdom by 16.3% (Forbes Georgia).

Interest in Georgia is promoted by the policy implemented by the country's government. So, for example, within the framework of the World Tourism Day, high-ranking representatives of 40 countries, ministers and 300 delegates visited Georgia. The National Tourism Administration of Georgia has been participating in the IFTM Top Resa international tourist exhibition in Paris for many years. In 2024, 170 countries of the world were represented here, 1400 companies participated, more than 30 thousand tourism professionals visited this exhibition. It is clear that such events help to attract more tourists from Europe to Georgia (Georgian National Tourism Administration).

The relevance of sustainable further development of tourism is increasing more and more. Which is of great importance not only to support the local economy, but also to create a more balanced basis for territorial development. Agritourism is often associated with economic growth, improvement of living standards and improvement of socio-cultural activity of rural areas.

It as an independent direction in the tourism industry was established on the European continent in the second half of the 20th century. The development of agrotourism in different countries is accompanied by the characteristic features of that country. To some extent, these characteristics are explained by the term used in different countries to denote agrotourism (Lobzhanidze, 2010).

Agritourism was conceived in the conditions of the decline of the agricultural sector in European countries. Due to low income, most of the population left the village and moved to the city, the number of young people also decreased. It was during this period that the foundation was laid for renting out the space vacated in the summer. Initially, agrotourism was considered as a secondary, additional activity of farmers that could ease their economic situation without significant investments. It can be said that similar processes are taking place in Georgia as well. As Kharashvili notes, with agritourism it is possible to combine the elements of farming and tourism. It provides a rural experience for travelers. The development of agritourism can have a positive impact in various directions, such as economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects (Kharashvili, 2011).

Visiting agricultural enterprises to celebrate agriculture and harvest is a long-standing tradition. In the United States and many other countries, this tradition is the basis of a new industry known as "agritourism." Although it is growing in many parts of the United States, confusion about agritourism has limited the ability of researchers and the agricultural community to fully understand the economic importance of this sector and maintain its effectiveness over time. Chase, et al, present a conceptual framework that includes core and peripheral levels and five categories of activities, including direct sales, education, hospitality, outdoor recreation, and entertainment. Agritourism is becoming an important industry in the United States (Chase, et al, 2018).

By increasing rural productivity, agrotourism improves employment levels, income distribution, landscape and rural population preservation. Stanovčić et al, consider agritourism to

include agro-tourism practices that are specific to the countryside. More precisely, the term agritourism is used in the general sense of "rural tourism", which includes both agricultural activities: harvesting, milking cows; Also, farm-based, but not necessarily agricultural, activities such as horse riding, food, etc. (Stanovčić et al., 2018).

Fahmi et al, noted that well-being is a rather subjective phenomenon, as it can be reflected differently in different people. But well-being is about meeting a person's needs and achieving a high quality of life. And agritourism includes those activities that rely on agriculture and are carried out in rural areas in groups or individually. This can bring significant benefits to the countryside, reducing unemployment, migration and poverty. This usually means that tourists stay in rural areas for a few days, live there, engage in recreational activities and experience traditional farming life (Fahmi et al., 2013).

The outflow of the able-bodied rural population to the cities has led to a decline in the rural population and a decrease in income from agriculture. Which led to a shortage of natural products in the market. The desire of tourists to relax in a natural environment and to be able to taste natural products, helped to reduce the process of migration from the countryside to the city, the development of agritourism as a specific field was stimulated, the local population has a new opportunity for employment. Tourists are also interested in nearby attractions, natural beauty and more (Tsetskhladze & Sulaberidze, 2021).

International travelers are encouraged to travel to Georgia by its attractive conditions. In the modern digital era, by correctly selecting and using marketing approaches and social media marketing, it is possible to increase the efficiency of the work of various enterprises in the system of the tourism industry (Todua & Urotadze, 2022; Todua, 2017; Todua, 2019).

A contributing factor to the attractiveness of a tourist destination is the local cuisine. It should be noted that the regions of Georgia are distinguished by diverse, different and delicious dishes. Wine made from grapes grown in different parts of Georgia is also different. Georgia is known as one of the oldest wine producing countries. Today, some Georgian wine brands are characterized by high recognition and approval in the domestic market, and their sales abroad are increasing (Urotadze, 2017).

Moreover, wine tourism is successfully developing in Georgia. Georgian wine participates in the world market at international exhibitions of wine and alcoholic beverages in a unified branded form, and by searching for new markets and sales channels, the opportunities to attract tourists are increasing (Kharaisvili & Gechbaia, 2017).

Georgia is also known as a country producing tea, citrus fruits, various fruits, nuts and various agricultural products. Although Georgia is not a large country, its regions differ from each other in many aspects, including geography, climate, economic development and cultural characteristics. But, a significant part of the food consumed in Georgia is imported, while the country has the opportunity to satisfy not only the demand of the domestic market with certain types of products, but also to become a net exporter of agricultural products (Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, 2015).

Since tourism is related to travel and being in a foreign country, security guarantees are of fundamental importance. The primary requirement of tourists is that safety throughout the trip. In big cities, security is more visible, and vice versa. In the case of agrotourism, when visitors are in villages far from big cities, they need high security guarantees. Interesting scientific studies have been conducted in this regard. Wu Yulai and others cite the following as guidelines for promoting tourism safety: the government sector establishes specific measures to prevent, care for, and create tourism safety for tourists; Government, private and public sectors promote community

involvement in tourism destinations, care and assistance for tourists; Information about tourist destinations is sufficient and up-to-date; Tourist destinations have security systems and procedures in place to deal with incidents or emergencies involving tourists; Entrepreneurs involved in the public transport system pay attention to quality, standards and safety of tourists. Therefore, the government and private sector, public sector and tourism stakeholders should be aware and pay more attention to the safety of tourists (Wu Yulai, et al, 2024). This is all the more significant because agrotourism is a very good way for family vacations. Interestingly, that agrotourism is very fun for children. Children's attitude towards this type of recreation is positive. They love petting pets, playing with them (if possible), picking vegetables, fruits, berries (Okrotsvaridze, 2021).

Agritourism offers an alternative type of vacation for those who live a hectic lifestyle. It is about staying in the natural environment and the opportunity to establish close contact with the local population. This type of tourism will reduce crowding in mass tourist resorts (Mura & Šulterova, 2012). Agritourism promotes the development of various activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, local food production, which leads to an increase in income in a particular area and country. It provides accommodation and additional services in various recreational facilities (cottages, wooden houses), in small accommodation facilities (hotels, boarding houses). Agritourism can create business opportunities for local small entrepreneurs and provide employment opportunities for groups such as women and youth (Ashley et al., 2007).

Agritourism has become an increasingly popular concept in many countries, as it focuses on diversifying income-generating activities for farmers. However it's of great importance to determine how profitable agrotourism is for farms, about which interesting articles have been written. The results of the study Bacsı & Száltelevi show, that a larger share of agritourism in total agricultural income is associated with lower family farm income per family worker, and this is especially true for large farms. This means that agritourism in the territory of the Visegrad Group is more important in farms with worse profitability and More needs additional income.(Bacsı & Száltelevi, 2022).

Khanal and Shrestha believe that agricultural development is critical to meeting the daily needs of hardworking farmers, helping to reduce imports by increasing the volume of locally produced products, solving the problem of unemployment, and providing raw materials and supplies to local industries. By using agritourism, it is possible to persuade farming communities to increase crops, adopt environmentally friendly behavior and protect biodiversity. Allows tourists to experience in practice the traditional farming methods that are still prevalent in the country (Khanal & Shrestha).

A lot of attention is paid to the development of agrotourism in EU countries. The old Member States derive considerable income from agro-tourism, while in the new Member States this is a largely untapped opportunity. The EU is very interested and active in supporting agritourism and sustainable development, and many policies, programs and initiatives address it (Maria-Irina Ana, 2017). The experience of the world shows that in those regions where agrotourism has developed, the social conditions of the local population have significantly improved, of the population that is isolated due to poor conditions and lives in deserted villages (Jabnidze & Jabnidze, 2016).

The agricultural strategy of Georgia emphasizes that it is important to stimulate the creation of new non-agricultural jobs in rural areas, to promote the development of family farms, including agrotourism, and economic diversification. According to the government, agriculture alone cannot

create enough jobs for the rural population. Therefore, it was decided to encourage such areas as agritourism, services, processing enterprises, etc. (Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, 2015).

Georgia aims to become the most popular agro-tourism destination on the map of the Caucasus in the next decade. The country will have many interesting offers for tourists in this regard - wine, food, variety of dishes, traditions, cultural heritage, outstanding landscape and biodiversity (FAO in Georgia). It is possible to increase the interest in agrotourism by using effective means of marketing work. For example, by holding properly selected and planned events, it is possible to revitalize specific regions and interest visitors in agro-tourism offers (Seturi & Surmava, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Agritourism is an opportunity to keep the environment clean. It offers guests a break from the city noise and stressful life. Tourists can relax in the fresh air, in a peaceful environment, in contact with nature and eat healthy and natural food, taste the dishes. The guest seems to become a member of the host's family, is involved in his daily life, which creates special relationships between them.

Agritourism in Georgia has great potential due to diverse traditions, local cuisine, rich cultural and agrarian heritage. Every region in the country is characterized by unique customs, peculiarities of agricultural production, with its own unique natural cover, relief. Agrotourism in Georgia is at the initial stage of development. There are already examples of how you can achieve success in the field of agritourism and attract many visitors, including foreigners. If a tourist in Kakheti participates in picking grapes, pressing them and preparing churchkhela, a guest in Guria can participate in picking fruits, making dried fruits from them, etc. (How dried candy corn was created).

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, every country has its own approach to agritourism. They differ in the products produced by the farmers. There is a great potential for the expansion of agrotourism in Georgia. At the same time, there is a rich cultural heritage and untouched natural areas. Using modern marketing approaches, it is possible to attract more visitors interested in agritourism.

Agritourism can play a positive role for the country in various directions: reduction of unemployment in rural areas, creation of new jobs in the field of tourism and food, development of infrastructure in rural areas, preservation of local culture and traditions, promotion of handicrafts and folk crafts, sustainability of the natural environment, use of educational opportunities for both visitors and locals. However, a large part of the local population still lacks knowledge about the positive role and opportunities of agritourism. It is necessary to inform the population about the positive results of agrotourism. Which will help them to use their abilities effectively.

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