

ANALYSIS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRO-TOURISM IN ROMANIA

Mihaela STANCIU, Liviu MARCUTA, Alina MARCUTA, Cristiana TINDECHE, Mariana PREDA (ALEXE)

University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest of Bucharest, 59 Marasti Boulevard, District 1, 011464, Bucharest, Romania, Phone: +40213182564, Fax:+40213182888, Emails: mihaela.stanciu@mikatravel.ro; marcuta.liviu@managusamv.ro; marcuta.alina@managusamv.ro; cristina.tindeche@managusamv.ro; alexemariana26@yahoo.com

Corresponding author: alexemariana26@yahoo.com

Abstract

Agritourism offers rural areas a chance to grow by diversifying the local economy, generating employment, and reviving communities. It also helps to value rural culture, traditions, and natural landscapes while drawing visitors seeking out genuine, environmentally conscious experiences. Agritourism encourages balanced economic development, lowers rural-urban migration, and helps communities become more self-sufficient by boosting local produce and assisting with agricultural endeavors. Agritourism promotes ethical behaviors including waste management, the use of renewable energy sources, and the conservation of natural resources, all of which support environmental preservation and ecological awareness in the framework of sustainable development. Thus, in addition to raising the standard of living in rural areas, agritourism is essential to building a robust and sustainable economy. The research aimed to identify the regions with the greatest growth potential, assess tourist flows and propose recommendations for a more balanced distribution of tourism activities. The methodology included a comparative analysis of statistical data from the period 2020-2023 regarding the capacity and use of guesthouses by region and macro-region, using annual growth indicators to measure the evolution of tourism demand and supply. The data were collected from official sources and interpreted to highlight both growth trends and regions with low potential, with the intention of offering helpful data for the creation of agritourism sustainable development plans. The findings were used to provide a set of conclusions and suggestions for Romania's agritourism industry's growth and diversification.

Key words: agritourism, sustainable, development, Romania

INTRODUCTION

The process of sustainable tourism development is intricate and ongoing, requiring the presence of a long-term vision and the conscientious participation of all stakeholders. According to studies, this kind of tourism has positive social and environmental effects in addition to economic ones, helping to preserve and value natural and cultural resources and promote the peaceful growth of visitor communities [2, 11].

Beginning with these factors, it is important to keep in mind that this strategy aims to strike a balance between promoting tourism and protecting the environment. This balance includes policies and practices that minimize adverse effects on resources and the environment while simultaneously

maximizing the social and economic benefits for local communities [1, 3, 12]. For the benefit of future generations, the primary goal is to develop a type of tourism that is sustainable over the long run, provided that the natural, cultural, and economic resources are maintained unchanged. Since sustainable tourism depends on protecting the environment, its operations must guarantee that natural resources are managed properly, that energy and water usage are reduced, that waste is handled appropriately, and that pollution levels are reduced [4, 19].

Numerous tourist sites incorporate renewable energy sources as part of their ecological projects and conservation policies, the creation of recycling programs, ecological education for tourists with the aim of ensuring sustainability [17, 24].

The desire to preserve natural and cultural resources and practice responsible consumption are the cornerstones of the interaction between this type of tourism and the younger generations, so that they remain accessible for the future, considering the increasing awareness of the negative impact on that human activities have on the environment [9, 18, 22]. Sustainable tourism thus responds to the requirement to promote travel practices that respect ecosystems, support local communities and preserve cultural authenticity.

In addition to protecting the environment, the development of sustainable tourism places a strong emphasis on preserving and promoting cultural heritage, by supporting local traditions and crafts that can be included in tourist experiences [13, 14, 21]. Thus, tourists can participate in authentic activities and better understand the local culture, which contributes to preserving the cultural identity of the regions. Instead of mass tourism, they prefer less crowded destinations, where they can contribute directly to the well-being of communities and to protecting the environment, sustainable tourism also becoming a form of education, encouraging a more conscious and responsible lifestyle [10, 23]. By using this type of travel, younger generations can have an impact on how the tourist sector changes and encourage companies to use socially and environmentally conscious practices. Because local communities' participation in tourism activities not only boosts the regional economy but also guarantees steady incomes for the residents of the areas, the local economy in turn plays a significant role in the development of sustainable tourism. This is because local communities engage in conservation practices and create ecological initiatives that use renewable energy. By creating jobs and boosting local businesses, sustainable tourism helps reduce poverty and improve the quality of life in destination communities [15, 16, 20].

Lastly, responsible travel is promoted by sustainable tourism. The long-term viability of this kind of tourism depends on tourists' ecological education, which includes reducing

their environmental impact and following travel laws. Encouraging tourists to participate in green activities or contribute to conservation funds is one way to integrate sustainability into their behavior.

Therefore, successfully implementing sustainable tourism must be based on close collaboration between authorities, local communities and the private sector, and government policies must support investments in sustainable infrastructure and provide incentives for businesses that adopt responsible practices.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the regions with a high potential for in agrotourism regarding tourist flows and the capacity and use of guesthouses, reflecting the evolution of tourism demand and supply.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative approach was used in the research methodology to analyze the sustainable development of agritourism, which includes analyzing statistical data released by Romania's National Institute of Statistics, and which were collected, processed and analyzed, so that they led us to obtain relevant conclusions regarding the way of evolution and development of agotourism in Romania.

The analyzed indicators, which allowed us to compare the data, were:

The number of visitors and the yearly growth rate, which included analyzing the flow of visitors within the agritourism guesthouses and separating them into Romanian and foreign visitors, may have shown rising or falling trends. We were able to compare the dynamics between years by using the yearly growth rate, which is computed as follows:

$$\text{Percentage increase (\%)} = \frac{\text{Current Year Value} - \text{Previous Year Value}}{\text{Previous Year Value}} \times 100$$

The average length of stay is the indicator that measures the preferences of tourists and that influences the economic and ecological impact. Analyzing annual variations allowed

us to establish seasonal trends and potential for sustainability.

The accommodation capacity and the degree of occupancy are indicators that indicate the available infrastructure and the demand, and the analysis of the variations in the degree of occupancy allows the evaluation of the sustainability and adaptation of the agritourism infrastructure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The examination of how the lodging capacity in agritourism guesthouses has changed over time gives us with information regarding the interest that tourists have in agritourism, as well as its ability to support long-term demand. The indicator reflects both the attractiveness of the region and the level of investment in tourism infrastructure, reflecting local economic development trends (Fig. 1). By monitoring the accommodation capacity, we aimed to evaluate the way in which the development of agritourism is sustainable or influences the local communities. Additionally, the development of this capability shows how agro-tourism guesthouses have adapted to the demands of contemporary guests, incorporated ecological practices into their operations, and helped create jobs in the area.

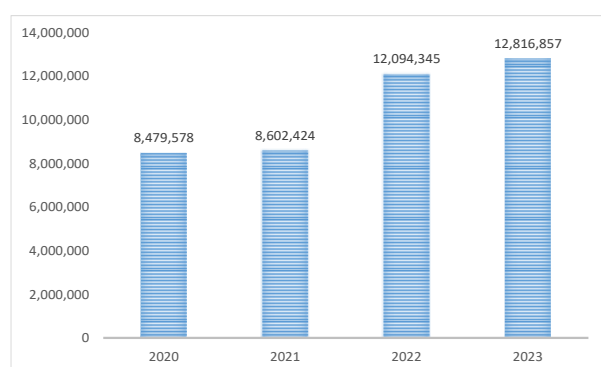


Fig. 1. The growth of hotel capacity in Romanian agritourism guesthouses from 2020 to 2023
 Source: own processing (places-days) [5, 6, 7, 8].

An evolution of the lodging capacity of agritourism guesthouses is seen based on data from 2020–2023, with notable fluctuations in the growth rate given that 2020 was the year that the Covid-19 epidemic struck. Consequently, the growth rate in 2021 was a

mere 1.45%. In response to the pandemic crisis's aftermath, which increased demand for agritourism and rural travel, it rose at a pace of 40.59% starting in 2022. Although at a lesser rate of 5.97, growth continued in 2023 (Fig. 2). These trends show how the hotel capacity in this sector is dynamically adapting, underscoring the importance of agritourism in Romania.

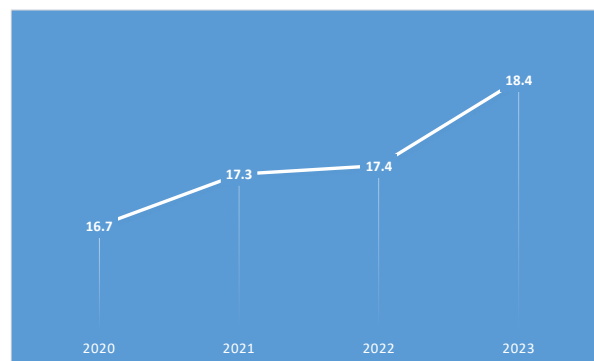


Fig. 2. The shift in the net utilization indices of the lodging capacity of Romanian agritourism guesthouses from 2020 to 2023 (%)

Source: own processing [5, 6, 7, 8].

Between 2020 and 2023, agritourism guesthouses' visitor capacity utilization index grew gradually. It grew by 3.59% in 2021 compared to 2020. The use increased by 5.75% in 2023 due to the rise in demand for agritourism, particularly for sustainable and nature-based places, but the increase was only low (0.58%) in 2022 (Fig. 3).

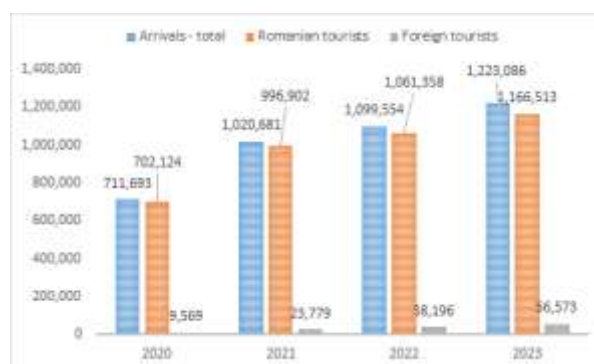


Fig. 3. The change in visitors to Romanian agritourism guesthouses between 2020 and 2023 (no. arrivals)
 Source: Own design based on teh data from [5, 6, 7, 8].

In the period 2020-2023, total tourist arrivals increased significantly. In 2021 compared to 2020, the increase was 43.42%, with an advance of 41.98% for Romanian tourists and an increase of 148.50% for foreign tourists. In

2022, the growth rate stabilized, with total arrivals increasing by 7.73%, this being due to the number of Romanian tourists, which increased by 6.47%, and foreign tourists, which continued to increase (60.63%).

In 2023, the growth rate of total arrivals was 11.23%, due to the growth rate of Romanian tourists of 9.91% and 48.11% for foreign ones. These demonstrate the interest in agritourism and its support from both internal and external tourists.

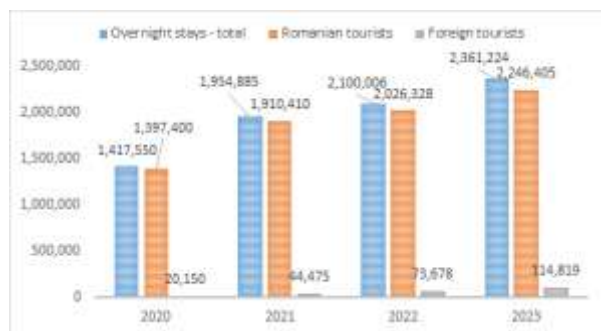


Fig. 4. The development of overnight stays in Romanian agritourism guesthouses between 2020 and 2023 (number overnight stays)
 Source: Own design based on the data from [5, 6, 7, 8].

The overnight stay growth index for agritourism guesthouses for the 2020–2023 period rose from 37.91% in 2021 to 2020. This resulted from a 36.71% increase in Romanian tourists and a 120.72% increase in foreign tourists.

The overall overnight stays growth rate in 2022 was a mild 7.42%, with a 6.07% increase for Romanian tourists and a 65.66% increase for foreign tourists.

In 2023, the overall growth was 12.44%, with foreign tourists increasing by 55.84% and Romanian tourists increasing by 10.86% (Fig. 4). Foreign visitors' overnight stays are on the rise, however this is during the early aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Romanian agritourism guesthouses' lodging arrangements throughout the 2020–2023 timeframe exhibit regional variances. With market shares ranging from 33% to 37%, the market leader is unquestionably the Center Region. The North-West Region followed, increasing from 21% in 2020 to 26% in 2023 as a result of the expansion of agritourism. With weights ranging from 17% to 18%, the North-East Region's contribution was

comparatively steady, whereas the South-Mountain Region's varied from a minimum of 6% in 2023 to a maximum of 8% in 2022. The contributions from the South-East Regions, Bucharest-Ilfov, South-West Oltenia, and West were modest but consistent, falling below 8%, with no appreciable fluctuations (Fig. 5).

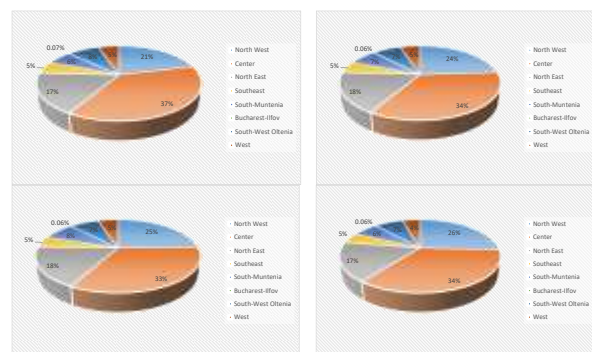


Fig. 5. The distribution of lodging options in Romanian agritourism guesthouses by development regions between 2020 and 2023 (%)
 Source: Own design based on the data from [5, 6, 7, 8].

These data demonstrate the role of the Central and North-West regions in Romanian agritourism, but also the growing interest in mountainous and hilly areas, known for their landscapes and rural traditions.

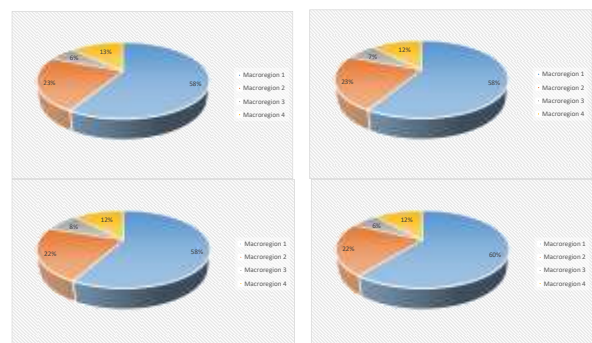


Fig. 6. The distribution of lodging options in Romanian agritourism guesthouses by microregions between 2020 and 2023 (%)
 Source: Own design based on the data from [5, 6, 7, 8].

In the period 2020–2023, the structure of accommodation places in agritourism guesthouses in Romania, analyzed by macroregions, shows a clear concentration in Macroregion 1, which had a stable share of 58% in the first three years analyzed and reaching 60% in 2023. Macroregion 2 had a steady contribution, falling from 23% to 22%. The weight held by Macroregion 3 increased

from 6% in 2020 to 8% in 2022. Macroregion 4 had a weight of 12% in the analyzed period (Fig. 6). The dominance of Macroregion 1 in the practice of agrotourism is thus established, as a result of a well-developed tourist infrastructure and a higher attractiveness for tourists within it.

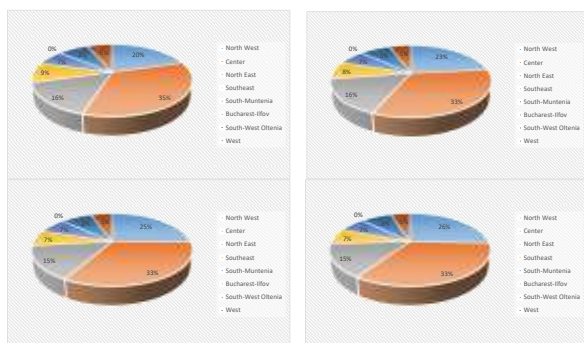


Fig. 7. The distribution of lodging capacity in Romanian agrotourism guesthouses by development regions between 2020 and 2023 (%)
 Source: Own design based on the data from [5, 6, 7, 8].

In the period 2020-2023, the structure of the accommodation capacity in tourist guesthouses in Romania had a concentrated distribution in a few regions. Thus, the Center Region dominates the market, with shares between 33-35%. The North-West came next, rising from 20% in 2020 to 26% in 2023. The Southeast Region had a decline from 9% to 7%, while the North-East Region saw a decline from 16% to 15%. The Bucharest-Ilfov Region lacked a relevant agrotourism capability, whereas the South-Muntenia and South-West Oltenia regions held steady shares of 7% and 8%, respectively. The Western Region's shares ranged from 5% to 6% (Fig. 7).

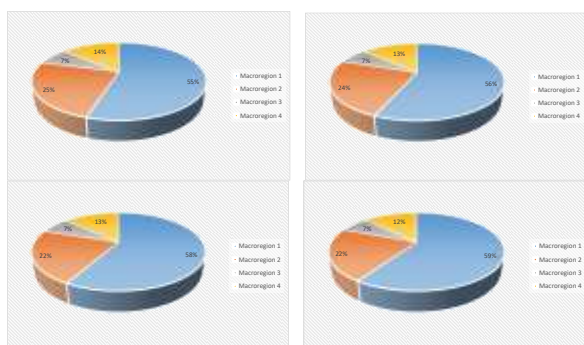


Fig. 8. The distribution of lodging capacity in Romanian macroregions' agrotourism guesthouses between 2020 and 2023 (%)
 Source: Own design based on the data from [5, 6, 7, 8].

In the period 2020-2023, the accommodation capacity in agrotourism guesthouses in Romania was concentrated in Macroregion 1, with percentages between 55% and 59%, confirming the importance of this area for agrotourism. Macroregion 2 saw a decrease, from 25% in 2020 to 22% in 2022 and 2023, and Macroregion 3 maintained a constant share of 7%. Macroregion 4 decreased slightly, from 14% to 12%, demonstrating the concentration of accommodation capacity in Macroregion 1 (Fig. 8).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of data on the capacity and use of agrotourism guesthouses in Romania for the period 2020-2023 shows a constant increase in demand, with a concentration of accommodation capacity and tourist flows in Macroregion 1 and in the Center and North-West regions. Although these regions attract the majority of tourists, both Romanian and foreign, the less developed regions and macro-regions remain stable from the point of view of practicing agrotourism. The increase in the number of overnight stays and arrivals, especially from foreign tourists, reflects the growing interest in rural tourism and agrotourism, favored by the post-pandemic trends of being close to nature.

By investing in infrastructure and encouraging local initiatives, it may be possible to increase lodging options and tourism in less-traveled areas, like Macroregions 2, 3, and 4, which would help to diversify non-agricultural activities and boost tourism in these areas. Promoting emerging regions could distribute the tourist flow more evenly, lessening the strain on popular destinations and promoting equitable economic growth. Additionally, we believe that incorporating ecological practices and offering a variety of authentic and sustainable tourist experiences could help make agrotourism guesthouses more appealing and establish Romania as a destination for ethical and sustainable agrotourism.

REFERENCES

- [1]Ali, M. A., Kamraju, M., Sonaji, D. B., 2024, Economic policies for sustainable development: Balancing growth, social equity, and environmental protection. *ASEAN Journal of Economic and Economic Education*, 3(1), 23-28.
- [2]Barbieri, C., Sotomayor, S., Aguilar, F. X., 2019, Perceived benefits of agricultural lands offering agritourism. *Tourism planning & development*, 16(1), 43-60.
- [3]Crețu, R. C., Ștefan, P., Alecu, I. I., 2021, Has tourism gone on holiday? Analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism and post-pandemic tourism behavior.
- [4]Damian, C. M., Smedescu, D. I., Panait, R., Buzatu, C. S., Vasile, A., Tudor, V. C., 2024, The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on rural tourism in Europe. *Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 24(2), 407-412.
- [5]INSSE, National Institute of Statistics, 2020, Tourism activity in 2020, https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/seria_turism_in_anul_2020.pdf, Accessed on 10.10.2024.
- [6]INSSE, National Institute of Statistics, 2021, Tourism activity in 2021, https://insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/publicatii%20statistice%20operative/seria_turism_in_anul_2021.pdf, Accessed on 10.10.2024.
- [7]INSSE, National Institute of Statistics, 2022, Tourism activity in 2022, https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/seria_turism_in_anul_2022.pdf, Accessed on 10.10.2024.
- [8]INSSE, National Institute of Statistics, 2023, Tourism activity in 2023, https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/seria_turism_in_anul_2023.pdf, Accessed on 10.10.2024.
- [9]Jhavar, A., Kumar, P., Israel, D., 2024, Impact of materialism on tourists' green purchase behavior: Extended norm activation model perspective. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 30(4), 841-855.
- [10]Khan, N., Khan, W., Humayun, M., Naz, A., 2024, Unlocking the Potential: Artificial Intelligence Applications in Sustainable Tourism. *The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Regenerative Tourism and Green Destinations*, 303-316.
- [11]LaPan, C., Xu, S., 2024, Pluralities of agritourism: Exploring political values and social judgements. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 111, 103395.
- [12]Martins, P., Correia, A., 2024, Beyond sun and sand: How the Algarve region is pioneering innovative sustainable practices in tourism. In *From Overtourism to Sustainability Governance* (pp. 47-58). Routledge.
- [13]Marcuta, L., Onea, M. G., Marcuta, A., 2022, Study on the impact of COVID-19 on experiential tourism and transformative tourism. *Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 22(3), 403-410.
- [14]Marcuta, L., Marcuta, A., Popescu, A., Tindeche, C., Tudor, V., Smedescu, D., 2020, Study on the development of adventure tourism in Romania. *Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 20(4), 339-345.
- [15]Micu, A. R., Dumitru, E. A., Tudor, V., Alecu, I. N., Micu, M. M., 2017, The factors that influence the development of rural villages: Case study Semlac Commune, Arad County. *Proceedings of the 29th International Business Information Management Association Conference*, Vienna, Austria, 3-4.
- [16]Miralles, C. C., Roura, M. B., Salas, S. P., Argelaguet, L. L., Jordà, J. C., 2024, Assessing the socio-economic impacts of tourism packages: a methodological proposition. *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 29(6), 1096-1115.
- [17]Sánchez-Martín, J. M., Guillén-Peñañiel, R., Flores-García, P., García-Berzosa, M. J., 2024, Conceptualization and Potential of Agritourism in Extremadura (Spain) from the Perspective of Tourism Demand. *Agriculture*, 14(5), 716.
- [18]Sharma, K., Sarkar, P., 2024, A Study on the Impact of Environmental Awareness on the Economic and Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Sustainable Tourism. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 3(01), 84-92.
- [19]Ștefan, P., Crețu, R. C., Micu, M. M., 2012, Economic crisis and the implications on rural tourism and sustainable development in Calarasi county, *Revista Economică*, 799.
- [20]Ungureanu, G., Ciurea, I. V., Brezuleanu, S., 2004, Introducing Agri-tourism activity on Agricultural Households with medium size. *Universitatea de Științe Agricole și Medicină Veterinară, Facultatea de Agricultură, Lucrări Științifice, Suport CD*.
- [21]Van, B. T., 2024, The Role of Cultural Tourism in the Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Cultural Values among Ethnic Minority Groups in Tuyên Quang. *European Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 355-360.
- [22]Vu, A. D., Vo-Thanh, T., Nguyen, T. T. M., Bui, H. L., Pham, T. N., 2024, Tourism social sustainability in remote communities in Vietnam: Tourists' behaviors and their drivers. *Heliyon*, 10(1).
- [23]Wang, M. Y., Li, Y. Q., Ruan, W. Q., Zhang, S. N., Li, R., 2024, Influencing factors and formation process of cultural inheritance-based innovation at heritage tourism destinations. *Tourism Management*, 100, 104799.
- [24]Wiranatha, A. S., Suryawardani, I. G. A. O., Purbanto, I. G. R., Yudiastina, I. G. B. A., Bantacut, T., 2024, A conceptual model of rural tourism in Bali to build up global competitiveness. *Systems*, 12(7), 245.