

Article

“Agro”, “Agri”, or “Rural”: The Different Viewpoints of Tourism Research Combined with Sustainability and Sustainable Development

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to review the different viewpoints of research addressing “agro”, “agri”, or “rural” tourism, ascertain the implications of relevant scientific articles and suggest future research avenues related to sustainability and sustainable development issues. A two-step systematic approach was followed in identifying “agrotourism”, “agro tourism”, “agro-tourism”, “agritourism”, “agri tourism”, “agri-tourism”, or “rural tourism” articles in the Scopus database. Articles were selected if they corresponded to the keywords: sustainable development, sustainability, local development; thus, 252 papers were selected. The findings indicate that the literature does not analyze integrated approaches to sustainability, sustainable and local development in depth. The results are discussed mainly on qualitative grounds, from the supply side and with limited policy recommendations. They also display that the papers mainly refer to single case studies and comparative studies are lacking.

Keywords: agritourism; agrotourism; rural tourism; sustainable development; sustainability; literature review



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1. Introduction

The meaning of the terms “agro-”, “agri-” or “rural” tourism differs from region to region, year to year, community to community, enterprise to enterprise. Definitional inconsistencies are highlighted in the literature by many authors (e.g., [1–4]. Recently, [5] made an effort to harmonize these definitions). In brief, sometimes the terms are used interchangeably, and there seems to be a growing consensus that rural tourism is a broader spatial term [2] and the “working farm” is the most frequently cited requirement for agritourism [3] for both North American and European studies. In the exploration of scientific articles related to “agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism, it is obvious that the results increase over time, revealing the growing interest in these kinds of tourism. Lane and Kastenholtz (2015) underline that while rural tourism appears to have grown, it has also changed, and academic interest in it has changed too [6]. Dimitrovski, Leković and Joukes (2019) try to delimit the most frequent topics within the agritourism literature by defining a sample of 21 Crossref journals indexed in Web of Science [7]. For agritourism research, see also the recent articles [8,9]. Another recent article related to agritourism literature review and bibliometric analysis (referring to the Web of Science and Scopus databases for the period of 1980–June 2019) is that of Rauniyar, Awasthi, Kapoor and Mishra (2020) [10]. Similarly, Pérez-Olmos and Aguilar-Rivera (2021) carried out a systematic review for agritourism by searching documents in EBSCO, Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science corresponding to the period 2010–2020 and focusing geographically on the region of Mexico [11]. Furthermore, Ammirato, Felicetti, Raso, Pansera and Violi (2020), with the aim to highlight [12] the linkages between agritourism and sustainability, performed a review

of the scientific literature by analyzing papers through a text mining solution (the Latent Dirichlet Allocation—LDA) and introducing the level of analysis of each study: “micro-level paper”—a single agritourism farm as the research focus; “macro-level paper”—the effects of sustainability on a region or the industry as focus and aim.

In our study, by applying a systematic international literature review, the findings of articles in the Scopus database on “agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism are combined with sustainability and sustainable development issues, nowadays widely used in a wide range of areas and activities. These findings are studied by the authors, classified under six main themes, synthesized and analyzed thematically and geographically. Furthermore, in an attempt to confirm our identification of the most important issues and findings of the sample articles, an overview of agritourism is provided with the use of a knowledge map. The research goal is to confirm the fact that “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism need to further adopt the concepts of sustainable development, sustainability and local development.

2. Materials and Methods

With the goal of analyzing the different viewpoints of scientific research addressing “agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism, we followed a two-step systematic approach. Firstly, we defined the title and the keywords for the search of documents dealing with these forms of tourism. The English terms used for the literature review were “agrotourism”, “agro tourism” or “agro-tourism”; “agritourism”, “agri tourism” or “agri-tourism”; and “rural tourism”. These terms were searched in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of scientific articles in the Scopus database. Rauniyar et al. (2020), in a similar work [10], as mentioned above, called Scopus the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature including those published by Elsevier, Emerald, Taylor and Francis, Springer, Informs, and Interscience. The search was undertaken in early 2020 and yielded 2339 documents. Next, the keywords of those articles were placed into categories (based on the idea of [6], enriched by the authors); the journals where these articles were published and the origin country of the authors were also identified (see Tables 1–3). In the second stage, the articles were limited to English language studies which included the keywords: (a) sustainable development; (b) sustainability; (c) local development. Thus, the final number of papers was 252. At this stage, the full papers were studied by the authors and classified under six main themes as follows: (1) the three dimensions of sustainable development: economy, society, environment; (2) integrated approaches to sustainable development, sustainability and local development; (3) three additional issues, very important for the tourism sector: supply, demand and residents; (4) policy; (5) methods used: qualitative and quantitative; (6) geography of the cases: case study area/country. The final list of themes was derived by initial classifications from the keywords and the themes of each paper, which we afterwards categorized according to thematic relevance. These six main themes and approaches were not exclusive, and each paper could be classified under more than one theme and/or approach. In the following section, the first results of our exploration include all six themes with a deeper analysis concerning the main findings of three themes (1, 2 and 6) and a number of sub-themes.

Table 1. Keywords in categories from “Agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism articles in the Scopus database (March 2020).

Keywords in Categories	Number of Results (N)	Total Percentage (%)
Form(s) of tourism	1923	24.8
Countries/regions/geographic position-characteristics	1692	21.8
Tourism management and development	886	11.4
“New trend” keywords	593	7.6
Economics	534	6.9
Sustainability	428	5.5
Rural/regional development	361	4.7
Agriculture	226	2.9
Methods	214	2.8
Environment/ecology	176	2.3
Planning and land use	158	2.0
Cultural heritage	141	1.8
Community	122	1.6
Governance	96	1.2
Farm	80	1.0
Landscape	79	1.0
Recreation	53	0.7
Total	7,762	100

Source: <https://www.scopus.com> (accessed on 7 March 2020), processed by the authors.

Table 2. Scientific journals publishing “agro-”, “agri-” or “rural” tourism articles (1975–2020), (only journals with >20 papers are shown).

Scientific Journals	Number of Results (N)
Tourism Management	75
Sustainability (Switzerland)	71
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	67
Tourism Geographies	34
Annals of Tourism Research	32
Iop Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science	31
Current Issues in Tourism	29
Journal of Travel Research	29
Wit Transactions on Ecology and the Environment	27
International Journal of Tourism Research	24
Quality Access to Success	24
WorldWide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	23
Tourism Economics	22
Total	488

Source: <https://www.scopus.com> (accessed on 7 March 2020), processed by the authors.

Table 3. “Agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism articles (1975–2020) by country of authors’ affiliation (only countries with >50 papers are shown).

Country of Authors’ Affiliation	Number of Results (N)
China	258
United States	255
Spain	206
United Kingdom	161
Italy	130
Romania	114
Malaysia	105
Poland	80
Australia	69
Portugal	69
Indonesia	62
Canada	61
France	51
Greece	51
Total	1672

Source: <https://www.scopus.com> (accessed on 7 March 2020), processed by the authors.

3. Results

From the analysis of the scientific papers' keywords, summarized in Table 1 (for more details, see the analysis of Table 1 in the Supplementary Materials—Table S1), we can conclude that many different forms of tourism are referred to and terms are used interchangeably (for example, farm tourism, sustainable rural tourism). Moreover, a significant percentage of keywords (approximately 22%) include geographic information (e.g., countries, regions and characteristics of the selected case study areas). Planning, developing, managing and monitoring rural tourism destinations is a key concern, with particular interest in economic dimensions; on the other hand, the integrated concept of sustainability and rural/regional development approaches rank lower in the hierarchy of research interests. Furthermore, “new trend” keywords (such as marketing, innovation authenticity, social capital) which have appeared in the field in the last 10–15 years are frequently referred to. Cultural heritage, community (social), governance, landscape, and recreation are all, surprisingly, underrepresented. Nevertheless, more unexpected are the low scores for environment/ecology, planning and land use.

The great majority of “agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism related papers are published, as expected, in tourism journals (see Table 2). *Tourism Management* leads the field, closely followed by *Sustainability* and *The Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (approximately 15% of the sample each).

Table 3 presents the country of authors' affiliation. China and USA top the list, with almost the same number of papers (approximately 15% of the sample each), followed by Spain, the United Kingdom and Italy, each with over 100 papers over the years 1975–2020, making up 60% of the total sample.

The results of the second stage of our analysis, where, as already mentioned, the scientific articles were studied by the authors, classified and limited to those that include, among others, the keywords “Sustainable Development”, “Sustainability” and “Local Development”, are presented in Table 4. During this stage of analysis, a noticeable finding was that even if “agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism are important as economic, social, and environmental activities (14%, 21% and 12%, respectively), the literature does not analyze in depth integrated approaches of sustainability, sustainable and local development (found in only 14% of the sample papers). Such findings are discussed mainly qualitatively (56%, compared to 44% quantitatively), especially from the supply side of such activities (19.5%), while their combination with policy recommendations is limited (only 2%).

Table 4. Keywords of 252 articles in categories.

	Keywords	Number of Results (N)	Total Percentage (%)
1	Economy	142	13.9
	Society	214	21.0
	Environment	124	12.2
2	Sustainable Development	56	5.5
	Sustainability	79	7.8
	Local Development	9	0.9
3	Supply	199	19.5
	Demand	120	11.8
	Residents	59	5.8
4	Policy recommendations	17	1.7
	Total	1019	100
5	Qualitative methods	184	56.3
	Quantitative methods	143	43.7
	Total	327	100

Source: the authors.

With reference to the location/geography of the cases, our analysis indicates that the articles most frequently examine single case studies. There is thus a lack of comparisons between different cases and countries. Only approximately 7% of the authors apply such a comparison between two or more countries. Figure 1 presents the geography of the case study areas/countries used in the sample articles. More specifically, 55% of the authors have carried out research in thirty different European countries (with Italy, Spain and Romania being the three predominant ones), with the remaining 45% addressing various countries around the world (among them China, with 12%, and the USA, with 5% of the articles). Table 3 and Figure 1, clearly show that the country of authors' affiliation influences the selection of the research cases.

Geography of the case study areas - countries

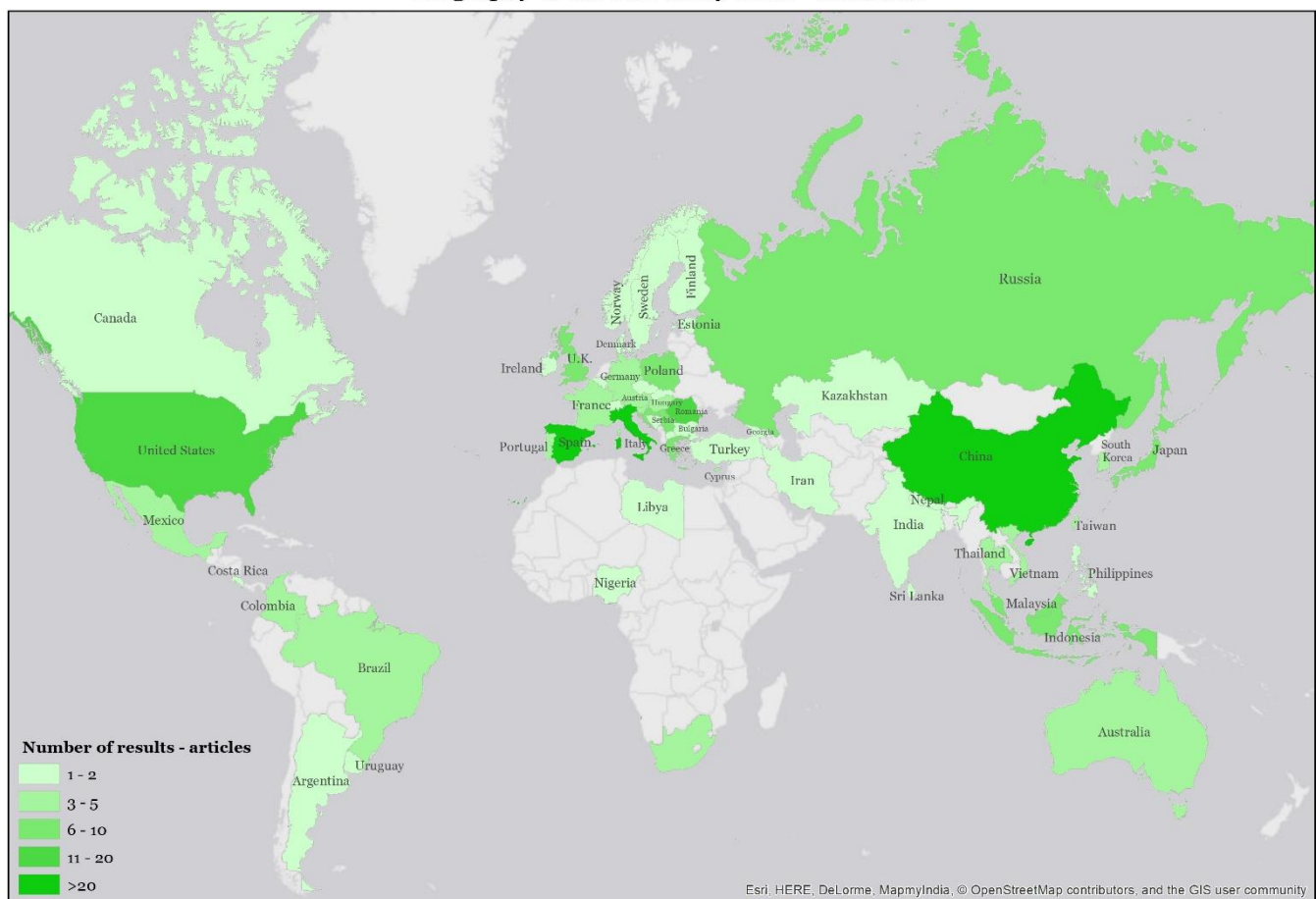


Figure 1. Location of the case-study areas/countries.

The most important issues raised by the sample papers, as well as their findings, are summarized per theme/sub-theme (economy, society, environment, sustainable development, sustainability and local development) in Table 5.

Table 5. Presentation of the articles' content per theme/sub-theme.

Theme/Sub-Theme	Most Important Issue(s) Presented	Most Important Findings
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Effects of tourism on household income [13–21] ■ A theoretical model of spatial distribution of agritourism consumption was developed [22] ■ Competitiveness in rural tourism [23] ■ Economic impacts of agritourism on the market of agritourism products [19,24,25] ■ Effects of using the ICTs on the activities of agritourism enterprises [26,27] ■ Agritourism as a form of multifunctional urban agriculture and tourism [28–32] ■ Impacts of agritourism enterprises operation on urban and rural development [30] ■ Willingness to pay for products and services (with eco-labels) [24,33,34] ■ Assessment of the effects on the local economy from the establishment of tourist infrastructures [21,35,36] ■ Socio-economic impacts in particular products [24] ■ Effects of tourism employment on taxation [19] ■ Creation of new jobs in tourism [16,19,21,35,37] ■ Analysis of consumer behavior in agritourism products [24,34,38] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assessment of high risk agritourism enterprises due to high prices and low productivity of farmers [39] ■ Power of consumption in agritourism gradually decreases with spatial distance [22] ■ Economic indicators such as regional GDP and mileage of highways positively affect the number of agritourism business units [23] ■ Greater impact of agritourism enterprises on the increase in agricultural profits and jobs compared to other types of enterprises [18,35] ■ Agritourism is a dominant strategy to increase household income [40] ■ Networks play a key role in creating the most suitable conditions for increasing the competitiveness of local production in the sector of tourism [41] ■ Positive impact of agritourism on the food supply chain [24] ■ A business model to develop agro- tourism on a large scale, which efficiently uses local resources in an integrated and synergistic manner, stimulating innovation in agricultural production and tourism programs [30] ■ Creation of many new jobs from the construction of agritourism infrastructure, strengthening the local economy [21]
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Construction of information management control systems and planning for agritourism activities [17,42–50] ■ Participation of rural communities in the development and management of tourism [51–56] ■ Contribution of the Internet to the provision of agritourism services [57,58] ■ Contribution of ecotourism to the improvement of prosperity at local level [13,59–62] ■ Comparative analysis in the regional planning of agritourism destinations [20,21,36,50,61,63,64] ■ Importance of migration in agritourism [65] ■ Contribution of (women) cooperatives in agritourism [57,66,67] ■ Role of women in agritourism [67,68] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Creation of new routes as an opportunity for the tourism development of rural areas [69] ■ Agritourism contributes to the mitigation of migration from mountainous areas [65] ■ Absence of a positive impact from the world heritage sites of rural areas on the development of tourism [70] ■ Agritourism activities reinforce the concept of multifunctionality in agriculture [32] ■ Involvement of communities plays a crucial role in decision making related to tourism [54] ■ Positive correlation between participation in collective community actions and characteristics of network structure (network density) [71] ■ Community plays a crucial role in the long-term development of tourism [72] ■ Strengthening the social position of women by engaging them in agritourism activities [57]

Table 5. Cont.

Theme/Sub-Theme	Most Important Issue(s) Presented	Most Important Findings
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Development of a new emerging form of tourism of olive production [73] ■ Production of alternative energy sources such as photovoltaic and piezoelectric by agritourism companies [74,75] ■ Waste management in the tourism sector and especially in agritourism structures [18,76] ■ Environmental impact analysis and management of environment in accordance with PLS model [77,78] ■ Incentives for selling organic products in farms [60,79,80] ■ Impacts of tourism in composition, configuration and changes of (rural) landscapes [15,31,32,45,81–86] ■ Behaviors and practices of environmental awareness by family agribusinesses [34,78,87] ■ Vegetation analysis [31,45,61,83] ■ Changes in agricultural cover and land use plans [32,36,80,83,88–92] ■ Environmental scenarios [93,94] ■ Landscape modeling [31,40,45] ■ Models which study soil erosion [13,14,89,95,96] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Practices for reducing the amount of waste [76] ■ Prospects for the development of rural tourism with low carbon dioxide emissions [74] ■ Creation of new organic products from eco-friendly farms [79] ■ Ecotourism as a strategy of sustainable agriculture [60] ■ Reduction in environmental impact by using agritourism products with eco-labels [34] ■ Eco-friendly marketing strategies are a tool for sustainable development in less-favored areas [67]
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assessment of the sustainability of ecotourism using complex indicators [13] ■ Contribution to sustainability programs with the participation of relevant inter-organizational stakeholders [52] ■ Versatility and sustainability: two closely related concepts [97] ■ Assessment of the sustainability of agritourism accommodation compared to agricultural enterprises [18,98] ■ Using of sustainability indicators for the planning of agritourism activities [18,20,36,83,99] ■ Sustainable tourism as an additional dimension of sustainability [100] ■ Use of the appropriate indicators to assess the dimensions of sustainability [20,21,37,99,101] ■ Introduction of political dimension of sustainability [101] ■ Measuring the concept of sustainability in agritourism on the part of rural families [99] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ecotourism cannot become a sustainable form of tourism in relation to other forms of tourism, using indicators [13] ■ Inability to study sustainability in terms of its economic dimension [13] ■ Local communities (in collaboration with all stakeholders) have a key role in the management of tourist destinations and the implementation of sustainability programs [52] ■ Agro-ecological tourism combines tourism and agriculture, strengthening the principles of sustainability [102] ■ Contribution of residents as an effective way to measure the dimensions of sustainability [37] ■ Encouragement of the adoption of sustainable practices by rural family enterprises [87] ■ Inability to measure sustainability with all four dimensions (economic, socio-cultural, environmental and political) [101]

Table 5. Cont.

Theme/Sub-Theme	Most Important Issue(s) Presented	Most Important Findings
Sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Multicriteria methods for measuring sustainable development [61,103] ■ Sustainable (rural) development as a combination of evaluation of rural tourism and changes in agriculture [15,29,104,105] ■ Use of indicators to measure the sustainable development of rural tourism [27,83,103,106] ■ “Demand management” (marketing approach) as a tool for sustainable development of agritourism destinations [107,108] ■ Impacts of tourism on the sustainable development of rural areas [83,105,109–111] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positive relationship between tourism activities and the dimensions of sustainable development [109] ■ Defining a functional definition of sustainable rural development for effective implementation of its principles [36] ■ Interconnected relationship between sustainable development and agricultural production [83] ■ Farm education is a key element of sustainable development [112] ■ Efficient operation of agricultural cooperatives promotes sustainable endogenous development [65]
Local development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Impacts of agritourism on local development using complex indicators [113,114] ■ Impacts of women agrotourism cooperatives at local level [67] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Measurement of the impact of agritourism locally based on agritourism units, scale and networks in small islands [113,114] ■ Formulation of new development plans of agritourism enterprises and their contribution to local development [57]

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This article highlights gaps in the “agro”, “agri”, or “rural” tourism literature with regard to sustainability and sustainable development, while also shedding light on geography-related information. This meta-analysis of scientific articles related to the above-mentioned form(s) of tourism is the only review paper which also examines the location/geography of the cases and is supplementary to other meta-analyses of the agritourism literature with different topical focuses, such as, for example, [6,7,10–12,115].

Furthermore, in an attempt to confirm our identification of the most important issues and findings of the sample articles, an overview of agritourism is provided in Figure 2, with the use of open source knowledge maps. It is based on the 100 most relevant documents (52 open access) taken from BASE (which provides access to over 100 million documents from more than 5200 content sources in all disciplines and uses journal/newspaper article document types) up to 10th of November 2019. The algorithm groups together papers that have many words in common, in a way similar to our keywords grouping in categories. Knowledge maps provide an instant overview of a topic by showing the main areas at a glance, and papers related to each area. This makes it possible to easily identify useful, pertinent information [116].

Our analysis points to the fact that “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism need to further adopt the concepts of sustainable development and sustainable tourism [6] as sustainability, sustainable development and local development of this form/these forms of tourism are given less attention than expected; a comparison with Karampela et al.’s (2017) meta-analysis of the literature on sustainable local development clearly shows the dearth of such themes in the “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism literature [117]. Therefore, alternative pathways towards achieving sustainability and comparisons between different cases should be addressed in future research. According to our geographical analysis, “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism are well examined and established in Europe, usually comprising a farm stay and/or meal and are well supported by governments in terms of the preservation of the scenery. Moreover, our analysis indicates that innovation in “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism is both an emerging theme in the literature and reflects the need for relevant developmental programs, as only “the existence of resources does not necessarily make an area a successful and sustainable tourism destination” [2] (p.14). In

the same vein, Yang et al. (2010) [30] (p. 384) in their survey concerning agro-tourism enterprises underline that “the lack of innovation on agro-services is a bottleneck for business development”. This is also the reason why innovation along with other popular subjects in the tourism literature, marketing, authenticity and social capital, are referred to as “New trend” keywords.



Figure 2. Knowledge map for agritourism. Source: <https://openknowledgemaps.org/> (accessed on 20 March 2020).

Even though the most important issues of themes/sub-themes—supply, demand, residents, policy, qualitative and quantitative methods—are not presented analytically in this paper, our preliminary findings indicate that they are explored mainly on qualitative grounds, from the supply side (related to the types of farms, the services and products offered [114] (p. 164)) and with limited concern about policy implications/recommendations. These findings are in line with Yang et al. (2010) [30], pointing to the need to compare more cases, both geographically (a few examples are the references [63,76,112,118–125]) and in scale (micro and macro level, locally and globally), from the supply and the demand side, with different stakeholders/actors (including residents, such as reference [126]), which, in turn, might lead to an improved theoretical and practical understanding of these types of development (sustainable and local). With regard to the combination and in-depth analysis of the three dimensions of sustainable development, economy, society, and environment, what emerges is that, thus far, authors have mainly adopted mono perspectives in their studies and multidisciplinary approaches are much less embraced, as also shown by Ammirato et al. (2020) [12]. Despite the extent of scientific literature and “grey bibliography” analyzing economic, social and environmental impacts of “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism, and the fact that these forms of tourism are taken as key factors for sustainable development, sustainability and local development, integrated approaches are largely

missing from relevant literature. Perhaps this confirms the fact that when the phenomenon to be investigated according to sustainability criteria (economy, environment and social) is too complex, as in the case of rural tourism, the simple summation of disciplinary approaches is always lacking while an integrated approach is needed that is not present in the literature. Additionally, despite the interest in the operationalization and measurement of sustainable development, sustainability and local development, through the combination of different dimensions and aspects, and using various indicators and composite indexes as policy tools for future planning and recommendations, such approaches are rare in the literature (see, for example, [27,83,103,106,113]).

Another crucial issue is that, for sustainable development of “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism, the balance between facilities and local culture based services [127] is important. These are cultural heritage, cultural tourism and community based tourism (culture, as well as culinary heritage, which strengthens the spirit of cultural diversity and community development, are displayed in the knowledge map, Figure 2). Nevertheless, cultural exchange and cultural diversity in the agritourism literature receive scant attention and theoretical discussion (e.g., [125] and the recent work of Karampela and Kizos [128] where, practically, led by entrepreneurs and stakeholders, agritourism and cultural tourism are promoted hand in hand). In addition, the landscape along with the environment in which the examined form(s) of tourism takes place, although paramount tourism resources, are inadequately dealt with in the literature.

Bausch et al. (2021) [129] recently proposed a behavior change research focus for sustainable tourism addressing the demand side and/or consumers’ understanding; their work concludes that “most consumers link sustainability only to environmental issues, and understand sustainability differently from sustainable tourism”. In reality, sustainability, sustainable tourism and sustainable development goals should be seen as a whole and it is extremely important for “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism to be placed and compared with other economic activities and forms of tourism. In “agro-”, “agri-” and “rural” tourism, two different sectors/fields (i.e., tourism and agriculture) are combined and cooperate. They are part of complex systems with local, regional and global interactions and they should be examined, compared and discussed in the broadest possible context. This is also the most significant contribution of this study: to illustrate the importance of understanding the relationship between the examined forms of tourism and sustainability issues, and to guide future research to promote better awareness, especially within society and among practitioners.

Supplementary Materials: The following are available online at <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su13179550/s1>, Table S1: Detailed Keywords in categories from “Agro-”, “agri-”, or “rural” tourism articles in the Scopus database (March 2020).

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