

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORT IN DEVELOPING RURAL TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract.** *The article highlights the distinctive features of rural tourism, and presents the main definitions and legislative policy of agritourism in developed European countries with a special focus on Italy. The paper also analyzes the long dating Italy's experience on the farm, rural tourism activities and the rural development policy providing incentives to the diversification of farming activities. This research has been conducted by aiming to identify whether legislative actions impact on the development of rural tourism and considering the need for urgent measures to create more efficient legislation and solve administrative problems in the field in Uzbekistan relying on the practice of Italy. Moreover, this study is based on a literature review and SWOT analysis of rural tourism regulations in Uzbekistan and recommendations are given on the problems facing rural tourism and their solution.*

**Keywords:** *Uzbekistan, rural tourism, agritourism, European rural development policy.*

## ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ ПОДДЕРЖКА В РАЗВИТИИ СЕЛЬСКОГО ТУРИЗМА В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

**Аннотация.** *В статье выделены отличительные черты сельского туризма, представлены основные определения и законодательная политика агротуризма в развитых европейских странах с особым акцентом на Италию. В документе также анализируется многолетний опыт Италии в области сельского хозяйства, сельского туризма и политики развития сельских районов, обеспечивающей стимулы для диверсификации сельскохозяйственной деятельности. Данное исследование было проведено с целью определить, влияют ли законодательные действия на развитие сельского туризма, и учитывая необходимость принятия неотложных мер по созданию более эффективного законодательства и решению административных проблем в этой сфере в Узбекистане с опорой на практику Италии. Кроме того, это исследование основано на обзоре литературы и SWOT-анализе правил сельского туризма в Узбекистане, и даны рекомендации по проблемам, с которыми сталкивается сельский туризм, и их решению.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Узбекистан, сельский туризм, агротуризм, европейская политика развития сельских районов.*

## INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is a country with potential for an expanded tourism industry (Saidmamatov et al., 2021). Many of its Central Asian cities were main points of trade on the Silk Road, linking Eastern and Western civilizations (Xudayberganov et al., 2020). Today the museums of Uzbekistan store over two million artifacts, evidence of the unique historical, cultural and spiritual life of the Central Asian peoples that have lived in the region (Ruzmetov, 2021). Uzbekistan attracts tourists with its historical, archeological, architectural and natural treasures (Bekjanov and Matyusupov, 2020; Matyakubov, 2019; Ollanazarov, 2020). The majority of foreign tourists mostly visit Uzbekistan to observe its history, culture, lifestyle and customs since heritage and

cultural tourism play a crucial role in the country (Doschanov et al, 2021). Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva are hot spots of tourism (Matniyozov, 2019). During the last 10 years, rural tourism has also started to develop by being considered as a new type of tourism (Matyakubov et al., 2018). As a result, the government is developing new decisions and concepts in the legislation based on foreign experience to develop this sector (Yakubjonova et al., 2021). Therefore, by conducting this research, the following research question about how the legislative actions have impacted on the development of rural tourism is addressed to understand the impact of government regulations on the development of rural tourism in Uzbekistan. Moreover, it is considered exemplary of experience of European Union Rural development privacy and national legislation of Italy in implementing tourism activities on farms.

## **2. Defining rural tourism and agritourism.**

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world today (UNWTO, 2016). With this rapid growth, a diversification of tourism products and destinations has taken place, with the consequence of the emergence and development of new and more sustainable types of tourism (Butler, 1999; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Su, 2013). These are forms of tourism that have been developed since the early 1990s as a response to several environmental and social problems caused by ‘mass tourism’ (Weaver and Jin, 2016). Sustainable tourism represents an approach consistent with natural and social values that allow hosts and tourists to enjoy a fruitful interaction and enriching experiences (Smith and Eadington, 1992). On the other hand, in a context of diversification of destinations and experiences, new types of tourists may seek new forms of experiences. For instance, over 20 years ago Poon (1993) claimed that there has been an emergence of new hybrid tourists who want to experience something new and different, travel independently, see and enjoy the world without destroying it. Similarly, Urry (2002) emphasized the notion of the ‘post-tourist’ – a tourist that has ecological values and seeks new experiences, health, human relations and personal growth. It is in this context that rural tourism has developed into an increasingly diversified phenomenon worldwide where “many tourists seek multiple experiences even on short rural holidays” (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015, p. 1138). Additionally, rural tourism has long been considered as a potential means for socio-economic development and regeneration of rural areas, particularly of those affected by the devitalisation and decline of agrarian activities (Iorio and Corsale, 2010). In particular, many funds have been devoted to supporting rural tourism units as a means of boosting flagging rural economies (Hernández-Maestro and González Benito, 2013). Furthermore, European Commission defined it as tourism in areas with a low density of population (European Commission, 2000, p.15), rural areas and villages. The UNWTO defines rural tourism as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally related to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, angling and sightseeing. Rural tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: (i) low population density, (ii) landscape and land use dominated by agriculture and forestry, and (iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle (UNWTO., 2016).

Hence, rural tourism is one of the forms of tourism with high potential, as it contributes to rural areas’ resilience, and stimulates local economic growth. Rural tourism, agritourism and village tourism are more often than not used as synonyms and, even though there is no widely applicable and universally accepted definition for this form of tourism, everyone does agree that it offers unique and specific experiences, in which the promoted lifestyle is primordial (Sasu & Epuran, 2016). Some definitions of rural tourism relate simply on tourism in areas of low

population, whereas rural tourist destinations can be generally defined as areas that are specifically identified and promoted to tourists as places to visit when the primary motive is enjoying the rural landscape and associated activities (Gašiš et al., 2014). According to Lekoviš (2009), rural tourism includes various forms of tourism activities, such as: agritourism, farms which tourists observe and participate in the traditional agricultural works; outdoor activities – recreation and leisure (hunting, fishing, horseback riding, biking, hiking, walking); rural experience (rural tourism) – tourists become part of everyday rural life. Besides, rural tourism is considered a stress releaser, an opportunity to take advantage of clean air, raw environment, a pleasant “back to origins” experience (Nistoreanu, 2006). Over time, the rural regions have witnessed the development of the so-called routes, for example the silk route, the wine route, or the amber route – some of these are still popular among specific types of tourists. Ultimately, according to Barbu (2013, p.128), who analysed various definitions of rural tourism adopted over the past 25 years, we can conclude that rural tourism is the kind of tourist services in rural areas, services involving investors, tour operators, local and central governments. These services include accommodation, meals (with a focus on traditional local cuisine) and all leisure activities according to the desires of tourists, but does not have the same significance in all the EU countries.

Moreover, agritourism is generally considered a subset of rural tourism (Phillip et al., 2010) which is based on the use of the resources present in the countryside (Roberts and Hall, 2001; Hall et al., 2003; Cawley and Gillmor, 2008). In addition, Agritourism is a means of creating new economic opportunities through farm tourism and is one of the strategies that has been proposed in recent decades to diversify the rural economy and sustainable rural development (Aliah A et al., 2021). Most countries of the world have considered this type of tourism as a new strategy for sustainable socio-economic development, revitalization, and reconstruction of rural areas (Su, 2011). In other words, this type of tourism emphasizes the development of a tourism product (Murphy et al., 2000) and should be focused on activities exclusively carried out in rural areas in order to attain the goal of combining tourism with agriculture (Adamov et al., 2020). A comprehensive review of books and articles indicates that there are several definitions and labels for agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010). Labels such as agrotourism, farm tourism, farm-based tourism, rural tourism have been used interchangeably and synonymously by researchers of this field (Wall, 2000; Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). In the present research the main characteristics of rural tourism and agritourism is expressed in Table-1 and various scholars have proposed different definitions of rural tourism and agritourism due to their specific features. Evans and Ilbery (1989) and Sharpley (1997) regard farming as the main pillar of agritourism. While some other scholars define agritourism as a combination of farming and tourism (McGehee et al., 2007; Tew & Berbieria, 2012).

Furthermore, agritourism offers farmers the possibility of diversifying and generating additional income through touristic on-farm activities to help balance the continuously decreasing income from agricultural activities (Streifeneder, 2016). According to Matyakubov et al. (2018) farmers provide a wide range of public and marketable services (food safety, sustainable development, landscape and environmental protection, rural areas viability, preservation of tradition-based cultural and societal values, recreational services) which enhance the food supply. Therefore, the role of agritourism farms is crucial in agritourism services and they provide indoor and outdoor accommodation, tasting or catering, own agricultural products and foodstuffs tasting, on-farm exhibition of traditional farming equipments, sport activities and excursions (Matyakubov

*et al.,2018*). Besides, agritourism is often considered as part of ecotourism, for both are related and subject to natural attractions (*Zoto et al., 2013*). Yet, in the case of ecotourism, the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature and local traditions related to the nature (*Dorobanțu & Nistoreanu, 2012*), while raising awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, minimizing negative impacts upon the environment, providing employment and generating economic benefits for local communities (*World Tourism Organization, 2002*).

**Table 1. Main characteristics of rural tourism and agritourism**

Rural Tourism	Agritourism
Rural tourism is considered a stress releaser, an opportunity to take advantage of clean air, raw environment, a pleasant “back to origins” experience ( Nistoreanu, 2006).	Agritourism is a component of rural tourism ( <i>Phillip et al., 2010</i> )
Outdoor activities–recreation and leisure (hunting, fishing, horseback riding, biking, hiking, walking), (Lekoviš, 2009).	Farming is the main pillar of agritourism (Sharpley, 1997)
Rural tourism includes agritourism, countryside tourism, farms that tourists observe and participate in the traditional agricultural works ( Škorić et al., 2017)	Agritourism is a means of creating new economic opportunities through farm tourism and is one of the strategies that has been proposed in recent decades to diversify the rural economy and sustainable rural development (Aliah A et al.,2021)
Often referred to as agritourism, nature-based tourism, farm-based tourism and village tourism (Wall, 2000)	Often referred to as “farm-based tourism”, “working farm tourism” and “village tourism”(Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008)
It is a new hybrid tourists who want to experience something new and different, travel independently, see and enjoy the world without destroying it (Poon, 1993)	Agritourism is often considered as part of ecotourism, for both are related and subject to natural attractions ( <i>Zoto et al., 2013</i> )

Source: author’s elaboration

The concept of agritourism has been discussed in a variety of forms in the international literature related to tourism and rural development (Flanigan et al., 2014), not having a standard definition or any consensus on the types of activities that constitute it (Schilling et al., 2012). Agritourism

is also often labeled agrotourism, tourist farm, holiday farm, farm based tourism and rural tourism (Phillip et al., 2010). *Pérez-Olmos and Aguilar-Rivera, (2021)* has formed evaluation of agritourism concepts based on different definitions by different scholars in Table 2 and some changes have been made by the author.

**Table 2. Evolution of the agritourism concept. Source: The cited sources and chronology of definitions ( *Pérez-Olmos and Aguilar-Rivera, 2021*)**

References	Agritourism concept
Dartington Amenity Research Trust (1974)	Any tourist or recreation enterprise on a working farm
Hoyland (1982)	The provision of temporary accommodation and/or indirect recreational facilities on a working farm
Frater (1982)	Tourism enterprises that are present on working farms and yet are largely supplementary to existing farm activities
Murphy (1985)	Working farms that supplement their primary function with some form of tourism business
Davies and Gilbert (1992)	A form of rural tourism whereby paying guests can share in farming life either as staying guests or day visitors on working farms
Beall (1996)	An alternative farming enterprise is a business conducted by a farm operator for the enjoyment and education of the public to promote the products of the farm and thereby generate additional farm income
Weaver and Fennell (1997)	Rural enterprise which incorporates both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component
Ilbery et al. (1998)	Farm tourism is conceptualized as an alternative farm enterprise (AFE) comprising one of seven possible “pathways of farm business development”
Maetzold (2002)	An alternative enterprise that links value-added or non-traditional agricultural production or marketing with travel to a farm or ranch
Sonnino (2004)	Involves hosting activities by farmers and their family members which need to be connected and must complement agricultural activities
Che et al. (2005)	Any type of agricultural activity that involves retailing of or services related to agricultural products directly at the production place to the public

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Wilson et al. (2006)	Activity that connects consumers with heritage, natural resources, or unique culinary experiences linked to the agricultural industry in a particular region of rural areas
Barbieri and Mshenga (2008)	Any practice, activity, or service developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors which includes a wide variety of activities, e.g., tours, overnight stays, special events and festivals, on-farm stores, fee fishing and hunting, bird-watching, hiking, horse-riding, and self-recreational harvesting
Manhas (2012)	Travel that combines agricultural or rural settings with products of agricultural operations, all within a tourism experience or a range of activities, services, and amenities provided by farmers
Gil Arroyo et al. (2013)	Farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes
Morán et al. (2014)	Type of tourism in rural areas that, in addition to the attractions of the territory, values other resources present there (gastronomy, artisanal production, agricultural species, agroindustrial products, and related activities) and makes them additional motivation for travel and permanence of tourists
Domínguez Estrada (2015)	Tourist modality in agricultural areas, with the use of a rural environment occupied by a peasant society that shows and shares not only its idiosyncrasy and agricultural techniques but also its natural environment in conservation, cultural and socio-productive manifestations
Roman (2018)	Part of rural tourism refers to leisure, including active leisure, for the plural of people on a working farm that offers various recreational and tourist services on the farm and outside it, in high season or throughout the year
Matyakubov et al. (2018)	Agritourism generally considered a component of rural tourism: while in the latter, the tourism and recreational services provided by a wide range of companies (hotels, restaurants, etc.) agritourism activities carried out exclusively by farmers
Frumkin (2019)	A complementary activity to agriculture and it enables farmers to welcome and cater for tourists and visitors at their farms

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According to Gil Arroyo et al. (2013), despite the growth of agritourism at the international level, there is no shared conception about this activity; causing difficulties and confusion that lead to diminishing attractiveness for consumers. Furthermore, this situation can hinder synergies and collaborations between stakeholders. In this context, Flanigan et al. (2014) adapted the typology

developed by Phillip et al. (2010) to define agritourism. Phillip et al. (2010) with this typology present an interesting discussion on the definition of the practice of agritourism: the agritourism is considered or not only by the tourist activities carried out in active farms as indicated by several authors (e.g., Dartington Amenity Research Trust, 1974; Murphy, 1985; Weaver & Fennell, 1997; Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). Furthermore, the original typology did not include input from key stakeholders involved in the daily practice of agritourism, thus adding the perspectives of agritourism providers and visitors to the typology adaptation (Flanigan et al., 2014)

### **2.1. EU Rural development policy and national legislation of rural tourism in Italy**

On a normative level, the European Union (Eu) makes generic reference to agritourism as a form of a holiday which is carried out in rural areas. In fact, most Eu countries equate agritourism with generic forms of rural tourism (*Marcotte et al., 2006*) and this has produced a limited increase of the phenomenon in the Eu (*Oppermann, 1996; Fleischer and Pizam, 1997; Vogt, 2013*), especially in areas with a long tradition of rural tourism (*Lesauvage, 1995*). In many countries of the European Union, the development strategy of region and rural areas, rural tourism is included, and it helps retaining the population, creating new workplaces and contributes to socio-economic progress (Muhi, 2013). Increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector was assigned as one of the main strategic objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and EU policy for rural development in 2014-2020. Moreover, the program on rural development in 2021-2027 is also recognized as a continuation of this program. The EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) is a political instrument used to regulate the distribution of financial support mainly to agricultural producers throughout the EU. Although its share of the EU budget has decreased from 66% in 1980 to 35% in 2020 (DG Agriculture and Rural Development, 2021a), it still comprises a considerable share of EU's total expenditure. It can thus be expected to have a substantial impact on the economic, environmental as well as social aspects of farming and living in rural areas. The EU Common Agricultural Policy financially supports the diffusion of agritourism businesses since the nineties, aiming at stimulating the farms diversification under the multifunctional role of its European agricultural model, based on small-medium scale family farms. Starting from 2021, the goal to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas is among the three objectives of the CAP, which also has set specific objectives related to attracting young farmers, sustainable business development in rural areas, employment, growth, gender equality, social inclusion and local development (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2021). Rural development, the second pillar of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), is a crucial policy of the European Union. It works to improve aspects of the economic, environmental and social situation of the EU's rural areas. Rural Development policy targets rural areas as a whole, with a focus on ensuring the competitiveness of farms and forestry, delivering sustainable management of natural resources and climate action as well as creating growth and jobs in rural areas (*European Union, Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation, 2020*). European Rural Development policy is implemented through Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), documents drawn up by EU Member States and regions setting out priority approaches and actions to address the needs of the specific geographical area they cover. In order to help rural regions grow and raise employment and living standards, the European Union's rural development policy has set three overarching objectives: improving the competitiveness of agriculture, achieving sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and a balanced territorial development of rural areas. Furthermore, in Italian context, the national rural development programme outlines

the priorities for Italy for the use of approximately 2.9 billion EUR of public expenditure (1.3 billion EUR from the EU budget and 1.6 billion EUR of national co-financing) for the period 2014-2020, was formally adopted by the European Commission on 20 November 2015 and last amended on 16 August 2021. The RD Regulation for the period 2014-2020 addresses six economic, environmental and social priorities, and programmes contain clear targets setting out what is to be achieved. Moreover, in order to coordinate actions better and maximise synergies with the other European Structural & Investment Funds (ESIF), a Partnership Agreement has been agreed with each Member State highlighting its broad strategy for EU-funded structural investment. The Partnership Agreement for Italy was approved on 29 October in 2014. According to European Commission (Brussel, October 2014), the Partnership agreement for Italy from 2014 to 2020 was developed and implemented. The PA covers four funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The PA focuses on the following priorities:

- Developing an innovation-friendly business environment by increasing private investment in R&D and innovation, promoting the development of an e-economy, incentivising start-ups as well as growing and competitiveness of small businesses.
- Increasing labour market participation, promoting social inclusion and improving the quality of human capital in particular by increasing access to employment of the most vulnerable groups in society (young, women, older workers, migrants and people at risk of social exclusion and poverty), improving the quality of education and training and modernising and strengthening labour market institutions.
- Supporting the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the public administration by means of reducing administrative burdens for businesses, promoting e-government services, ensuring efficiency of the judicial system.
- Strengthening the capacity of bodies involved in the management of ESIF programmes, in particular in the less developed areas.

In 2014-2020 Italy was allocated around €32.2 billion for Cohesion Policy (ERDF, ESF) including € 567 million for the Youth Employment Initiative (coupled by an equivalent ESF co-financing) and €1.1 billion for territorial cooperation. An additional €10.4 billion will be devoted to the development of the agricultural sector and rural areas by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The allocation for European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) amounts to some €537.3 million. We must emphasize that EU Rural development policy plays a crucial role on the territorial development of all member countries' rural areas ..At the same time, the generic reference to rural tourism implies an insufficient involvement of farms and the creation mainly of tourism farms in rural environments that do not carry out agriculture. On the other hand, Italian national legislation regulates agritourism in a different manner with respect to other forms of rural tourism, in this way representing a unicum in the international scene (*Santucci, 2013*). In fact, in Italy agritourism can only be performed by the farmer and his family members (*Law n. 96/2006*). Moreover, the tourism activities of the farm must be connected to agriculture, which remains the fundamental enterprise of the farm (*Sidali, 2011*). The rationale of Italian legislation is fourfold, pursuing ambitious goals related to (i) economic issues, by integrating farmers' revenues and by promoting local products; (ii) socio-cultural issues, by



consolidating the relations between the city and the countryside, and by preserving local traditions; (iii) environmental issues, by protecting the environment and the landscape;(iv) occupational issues, by creating new job opportunities, especially in the marginal areas, with the aim of limiting the exodus in particular of young and female labour force

## **2.2. Using Italian experience in implementing national legislation of rural tourism in Uzbekistan**

Even if agritourism is a worldwide phenomenon (van Huylenbroeck et al., 2006), in Italy it has taken a substantial economic and social relevance, with an increasing diffusion in all the Italian regions (Esposti, 2006) and representing probably the most radical product innovation that has ever concerned the national agriculture (Esposti, 2012). Italian national legislation regulates agritourism in a different manner with respect to other forms of rural tourism, in this way representing an unicum in the international scene (Santucci, 2013). In fact, first of all, agritourism activities can be performed by only farmers and their family members in Italy (Law n. 96/2006). Moreover, rural tourism activities must be connected to agriculture, which remains the fundamental enterprise of farming (Sidali, 2011). This predominance of agricultural activity is fixed in terms of working hours and not in terms of income. Therefore, in Italy agritourism cannot exist without farming, where a farmer focuses on providing agricultural services (Lupi et al., 2017). The next important point is that each Italian region applies certain quantitative limits, mostly on workload, accommodation, income or turnover, and qualitative requirements to govern the complementarity between the agricultural and agritouristic activities. Being a decisive criteria, agricultural workload per year, which illustrates the necessary or minimum average working hours or working days that the farmer is obliged to spend on agricultural activities, must be higher than the time invested in agritourism activities (Streifeneder, 2016). According to Streifeneder (2016), because of the complication of checking and monitoring the average working hours, most authorities indirectly control this compliance by stipulating a maximum number of guests an agritourism farm is allowed to host or accommodate instead of providing temporal thresholds. The national law in Italy considers agricultural activity predominant if the farm accommodates and hosts no more than ten guests (Italian Government, 2006). Italian regions can adapt this limit considering the regional territorial conditions. Therefore, the national regulation underlines the relevance of a good balance between the complementarity and connection with the agritourism and agricultural activities (Streifeneder, 2016). Last but not least, Italian tax policy operates on the income level of a farm significantly depending on how the agritouristic activity is handled for tax purposes, whether the generated income is declared as agricultural income and taxed accordingly, or it is separated as a tourist service (Streifeneder, 2016). Only a well-defined legal and tax provision context encourages the setting up of agritourism activities (Matyakubov et al., 2018).

In the author's view, these measures could be exemplary activities to be learnt when implementing a policy aiming at diffusing agritourism activities in rural areas of Uzbekistan. However, at present time, three main problems hinder the development of agritourism in Uzbekistan when the aforementioned measures are aimed to be adopted. First, since agritourism requires farms to invest to provide appropriate facilities, financial support is not yet adequate in Uzbekistan. This is one of the main reasons for the low rates of development of agritourism in rural areas of the country during the last years. The second problem is the lack of legal mechanisms regulating activities in the field of agritourism. According to Italian experience, the

existence of a specific law on agritourism activity is a crucial factor that should be adopted. Third, there is still a need for adequate investment on human capital for the purposes of specific training and education, and information provision. It leads to the reduction of wasting resources and finance by utilizing the most effective methods in the field. Finally, one of the most important issues is that the infrastructures in rural areas are not yet developed sufficiently. Considering that Uzbekistan has great potential for organizing agritourism business in rural areas, it is important for the country to obtain foreign experience to effectively adopt this tourism activity.

After the independence of Uzbekistan, special attention was paid to developing the tourism sphere. The first Law on Tourism was adopted on August 20, 1999 and updated on June 21, 2019 which regulates the tourism industry (Xudayberganov et al.,2020). Rural tourism is a new direction in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan, and in recent years the government has begun to pay more attention to this area. For example, a decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was issued in 2019 (PD/5611) "On additional measures for accelerator development of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan". According to this decree, Uzbekistan is gradually implementing comprehensive measures to diversify the national economy, accelerate the development of regions, create new jobs, increase incomes and living standards, and enhance the country's investment attractiveness as one of the strategic sectors. Also, recent analyses show the imperfection of the regulatory framework governing the tourism industry (Xudayberganov et al.,2020).

Therefore, it might be appropriate to mention that the main priorities in the development of tourism industry according to the decree are:

2019-2025 - institutional reforms aimed at creating a solid legal framework for tourism development, modernization of infrastructure and promotion of the country's brand;

2019 - 2025 - increase the share of the tourism industry in the country's economy.

By the end of 2025, it is planned to attract more than 9 million tourists, including 2 million from abroad, and increase the share of tourism in the country's GDP to 5% by developing the appropriate infrastructure in this area and promoting the tourism potential of the country in the world market. According to the decree, the Concept for the development of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019-2025 was developed, with a special emphasis on rural tourism. In order to develop agritourism and related infrastructure in the rural areas of the republic, the State Committee for Tourism Development, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture Recommendations for the development of rural tourism have been developed, including:

-Involvement of farms and farmers, local population in rural areas (mainly in remote and mountainous areas) in the tourism turnover (business);

-Construction of standard "tourist neighborhood", "village tourism" type housing complexes (traditional style) for peasants and farmers who have the desire and ability to receive tourists in the framework of rural and ethnographic types (traditional lifestyle, crafts, cooking, etc.) ;

-agro-industrial complex attached to a single structure (rural tourist cluster) by expanding and diversifying the activities of farms, organizing on-site tasting of agricultural products, including wine, dried fruits, sweets

### **3. Research methodology**

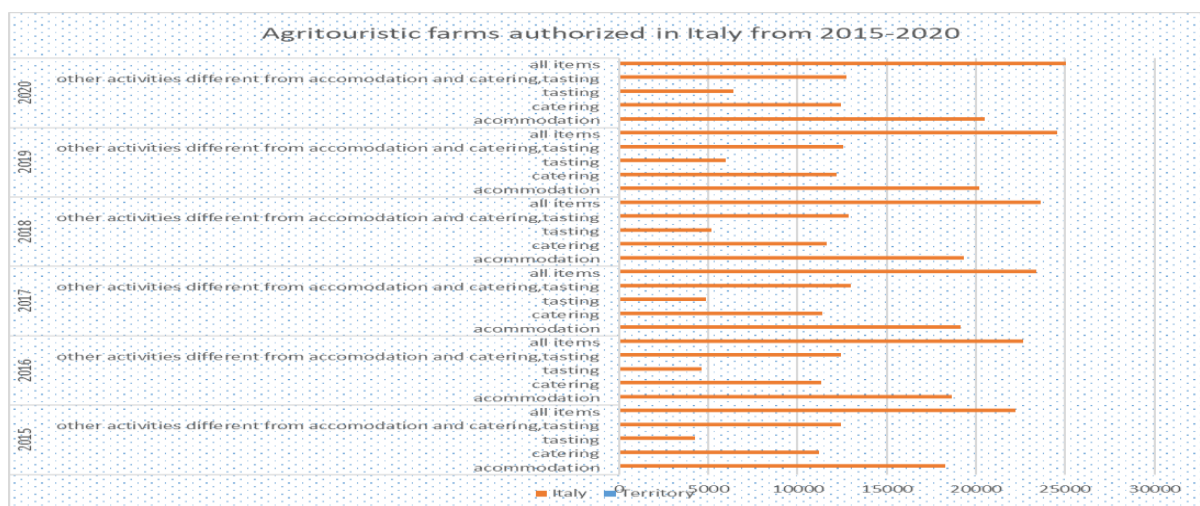
The methodology used in the present paper is a critical review of the literature. The sources of relevant literature investigation have been derived from European Commission official website and four databases, namely, EBSCO host, Web of Science, Scopus and Emerald. The types of

bibliographic sources included in the research are 57 articles published in scientific journals, books, conference proceedings, company papers and studies, white papers, online sites and online journals. To better analyze the results encountered from the theoretical and empirical perspectives, this research used the SWOT analysis framework, in which the findings are distributed among strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the rural development in Uzbekistan. This methodology operates as a fundamental phase of a strategic plan for rural development projects, supporting the scheme by organizing a baseline of indicators which embraces positive and negative conditions of internal and external contexts (Knierim and Nowicki, 2010).

#### 4.Results and Discussion

In the Italian context, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the agritourism sector had a fundamental role in maintenance and development of rural areas, under various aspects: social, economic and productive, landscape and environmental, local and cultural. In table 3, It can be seen analyzed authorized agritourism farms in Italy from 2015 to 2020 according to their providing accommodation, food and beverage, catering and local food tasting. In 2020, there were 25060 agritourism farms (registered agritourism farms), 484 more than the previous year (+1.9%). Also, in 2020 agritourism farms continued to offer several services. Tourist packages continued to be offered along with different services: 20492 farms provided both accomodation and food serving services, while 12.754 farms added to accommodation other agritourism activities and 25060 offered all the four types of licensed agritourism activities (accommodation, food serving services, tasting of local typical food and other).60.5% of agritourism farms with accommodation was located in the region of the Centre and South and Islands area, 56.3% of those with food serving services, 60.4% of those with tasting of local typical food and 63.9% with other activities.84.2% of agritourism farms were located in mountain and hill areas, the remaining 15.8% in plain areas. The growth in the number of agritourism farms which was registered in all geographical areas was more relevant in the Centre (+6.3%) compared with the South and Islands area Centre (+3.9%) and the North area (+0.8%)..

**Table 3. Agritourism farms in Italy from 2015 to 2020 (Accomodation)**



Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT(2021)

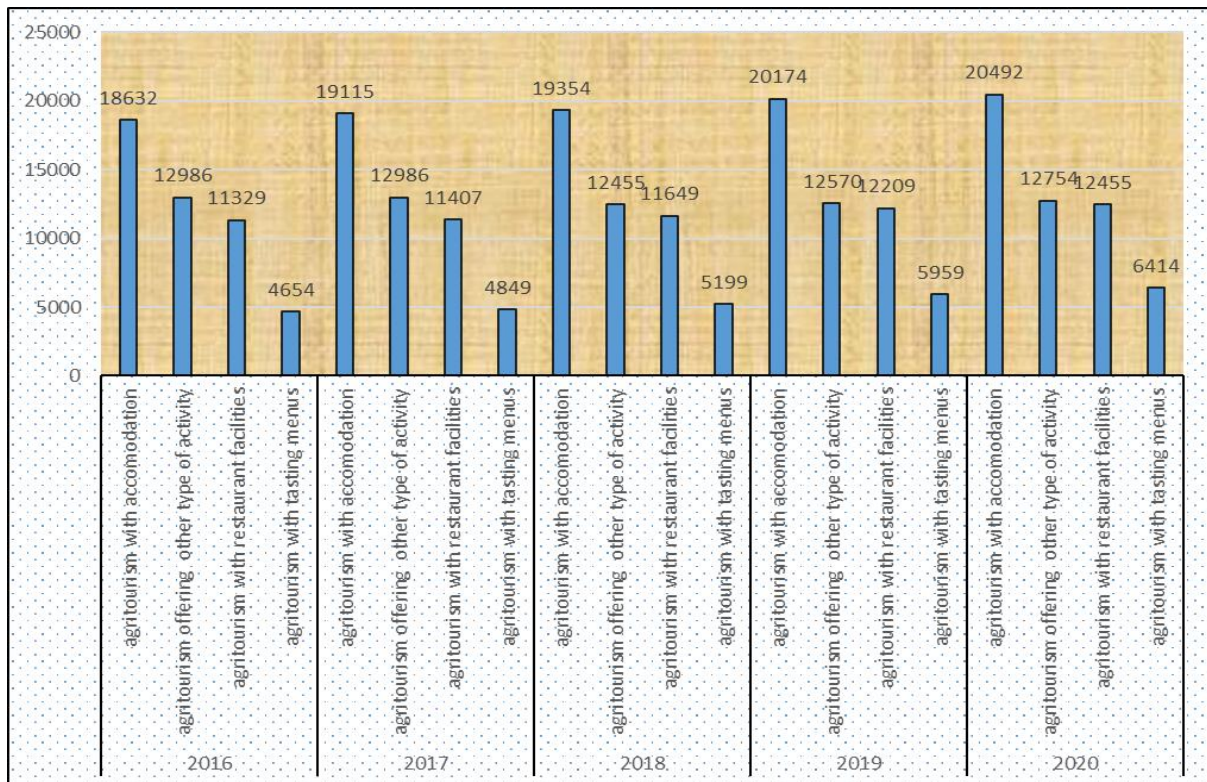
As shown in **table 4**, the number of agritourism farms offers various agritourism services such as, sport activities, riding, hiking, mountain biking, naturalistic observation, educational farms and other types of courses between 2015-2020. The number of agritourism farms which provided sport activities and mountain bike has experienced a significant decrease over 6 years.

**Table 4. Agritouristic farms authorized in Italy from 2015-2020 (ISTAT Data, 2020).**

Agritourism services	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
sports activities	4846	4752	5000	4780	3597	3647
Riding	1269	1357	1496	1424	1412	1437
Hiking	3242	3442	3482	3447	3115	3190
naturalistic observations	1110	1317	1240	1284	1481	1663
Trek	1838	1939	1932	1897	1608	1702
mountain bike	2666	2585	2595	2439	1623	1669
educational farms	1402	1497	1547	1516	1715	1911
various courses	1952	1917	1855	2017	1747	2031
various other agritouristic activities	6443	6704	7411	7501	8641	8850
all items	12416	12446	12986	12873	12570	12754

**Source: ISTAT 2020**

**Table 5.** Number of agritourism facilities in Italy from 2016 to 2020, by type



In graph it can be seen that the number of different types of agritourism facilities in Italy in the years 2016 to 2020. It is clearly see that agritourism with accomodation rose from 18632 to 20492 in the given period, which is a positive sign and the same applies for agritourism with restaurant and with tasting facilities. They rose from 11329 to 12455, and 4654 to 6414 respectively. Moreover,there were also many more other types of facilities in that industry which fluctuated over the years, but still were of a great number.

In addition, SWOT analysis of rural activities in Uzbekistan has been done in this research. According to Table-6, the tourism sector of Uzbekistan has its own strengths /opportunities and weaknesses/threats respectively. In order to maximize opportunities and strong sides of Tourism sector ,the government should focus on fair legislation and create more reforms in this area.The provision of preferential loans and subsidies to entrepreneurs and farmers in the provision of tourist services in rural areas and the introduction of preferential tax payments to further develop their activities are important in the development of this sector.

**Table 6. SWOT analysis of rural activities in Uzbekistan**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Prosperity in agriculture and gardening; the appropriate market for the sale of agricultural products to tourists (Saeedeh et al., 2017)	Limited agricultural lands ideal for farm tourism (Yamagishi et al., 2020)

Customs, local culture and scenic locations (Aslanova, 2019)	Lack of government policies, plans and funding in the area (Saeedeh et al., 2017)
Quiet environment, without any noise, especially for citizens for fun and relaxation (Matyakubov, 2019)	Lack of willingness of people to invest in the tourism sector (Bekjanov and Matyusupov, 2020)
Family running of the business (Maria & Nadia, 2019)	Lack of tourism infrastructures (such as roads and sewage), (Saeedeh et al., 2017)
Connecting with agritourism activities (Maria & Nadia, 2019)	Inappropriate and inadequate facilities of accommodation, welfare, and health services (Ciolac et al., 2019)

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• **Opportunities**

**Threats**

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The growing trend and tourist interest in farm tourism (Matyakubov, 2019)	Pollution of water, soil and climate resources of the area relative to competing areas (Saeedeh et al., 2017)
Increasing government support for farm tourism, ease of attracting local tourists (Saidmamatov et al., 2021)	Lack of regional register and specific legislation and regional network of farms (Reznik, 2018)
Allocation of tax benefits and subsidies by the government to those engaged in agricultural activities in rural areas (Saidmamatov et al., 2021)	Limited collaboration in the sector and with regional and education systems (Maria & Nadia, 2019)

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Meanwhile, to emphasize on internal weakness and threats, it has been tried that taking advantage of external opportunities, constitutional proposals are presented to remove weaknesses/threats in the district. It should be considered as opportunities that **the government supports farmers by implementing rural tourism and increasing local tourist interest to this field as well as allocating tax benefits for agricultural activities in rural area.** Furthermore, the strengths of developing rural tourism can be local unique customs, culture and scenic location. In addition to these measures, lack of government policy, funding in this area and limited collaboration with regional and

education systems in this sector illustrates the weakness and threats of rural activities in Uzbekistan.

#### 4. Conclusion

Agritourism represents a particular and important on-farm diversification to generate additional income that enables a farmer to maintain their farm and become more resilient to the volatility of agricultural prices, with well-known positive effects on rural and local development (Streifeneder, 2016). After a comprehensive analysis, it can be said that state investment in rural development and rural tourism development is certainly not —missed opportunity in Uzbekistan, but that serious progress is forthcoming, because both in socio-economic as well as in legal terms, the importance of rural areas in Uzbekistan is recognized. Based on Italian long term agritourism experience, the government of Uzbekistan should reform the legislation of rural tourism. According to aforementioned measures of Italian national legislation, agritourism activities can be performed by only farmers and their family members in Italy (Law n. 96/2006). Moreover, rural tourism activities must be connected to agriculture, which remains the fundamental enterprise of farming (Sidali, 2011). The next important point is that each Italian region applies certain quantitative limits, mostly on workload, accommodation, income or turnover, and qualitative requirements to govern the complementarity between the agricultural and agritouristic activities. Third, Italian tax policy operates on the income level of a farm significantly depending on how the agritouristic activity is handled for tax purposes, whether the generated income is declared as agricultural income and taxed accordingly, or it is separated as a tourist service (Streifeneder, 2016). To sum up, well-defined legal and tax provision context encourages the setting up of agritourism activities in Uzbekistan (Matyakubov et al., 2018). These measures could be exemplary activities to be learnt when implementing a policy aiming at diffusing agritourism activities in rural areas of Uzbekistan.

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