

AGROECOLOGICAL TOURISM AND GENERATED PUBLIC VALUE: THE CASE OF MASSERIA CASACAPANNA IN CHIEUTI (APULIA)

Petya Romanova

University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy
8 St. Kliment Ohridski Blvd., Sofia 1797, Bulgaria
romanova@uctm.edu (P.R.)

Received 15 November 2025

Accepted 23 January 2026

DOI: 10.59957/jctm.v61.i2.2026.8

ABSTRACT

In Italy, rural tourism has become an increasingly important form of sustainable development, capable of combining economic, environmental, social, and cultural objectives. This study examines the principles of agroecology applied to rural tourism, analysing the generated public value. Specifically, the case of Masseria Casacapanna, a multifunctional agritourism farm, is analysed through qualitative and quantitative data obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to the managers. The results show that the agro-ecological practices significantly contribute to the creation of Public Value by generating equitable and sustainable well-being in the region: they create local employment, support local economic networks, preserve traditions, and reduce environmental impact through innovative agro-economic practices. In conclusion, we emphasize the need to integrate the assessment of these impacts into territorial planning decision-making processes and rural development strategies, in line with the national objectives of Equitable and Sustainable Well-being.

Keywords: agritourism, sustainable, ecological, well-being, practices, masseria, multifunctionality.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, agritourism has established itself as a strategic component of Italian tourism and rural development policies, evolving from a niche phenomenon to a mature and diversified product [1]. There are approximately 26 100 agritourism businesses in Italy, nearly double the number since the beginning of the millennium, with an estimated production value of over €1.8 billion [2]. The Apulia region has stood out in recent years with approximately 850 licensed agritourism businesses as of 2023. Apulia records over 560 000 annual agritourism stays (46 % of which are foreign tourists) - a figure up 79 % compared to 2015 [3]. It is estimated that in Apulia, multifunctional agriculture now contributes approximately 20 % of the regional agricultural GDP, a sign of significant integration between agriculture and tourism [4].

Alongside the spread of agritourism, an approach

oriented towards integral sustainability in agritourism businesses, defined as agroecological tourism, has emerged. This involves applying the principles of agroecology - environmentally friendly resource management, biodiversity protection, and preservation of traditional knowledge. This vision is part of the broader multifunctional nature of agriculture, which sees farms not only as producers of food but also as providers of environmental, social, and cultural services for the community [5]. As Palmi and Lezzi highlight, agritourism in Italy reflects this approach, successfully creating value across the three dimensions of sustainability - economic, socio-cultural, and environmental [1].

In Italian academia and institutions, the concept of Public Value (PV) has emerged to indicate the overall impact of organizational actions on the well-being of the community. In the Guidelines of the Department of Public Function, public value is defined as “the level

of economic, social, and environmental well-being of citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders created by a public administration ... measured as a joint and balanced improvement in impacts compared to the starting condition" [6]. This definition highlights two key aspects: (i) multidimensionality of value (economic, social, environmental, cultural dimensions); (ii) co-creation of value (collaboration between public, private, and third-sector actors).

The literature provides extensive evidence on the economic and social benefits of agritourism for rural areas [7], as well as on its environmental contributions in terms of landscape and biodiversity conservation [8]. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize that the restoration of authenticity and traditions through agritourism fosters the socio-cultural vitality and well-being of local communities [1]. However, there is a lack of systematic analysis that frames these multidimensional impacts under the theoretical umbrella of public value.

Theoretical framework and literature review

Agritourism is defined by Italian law and specialist literature as hospitality and catering activities carried out by farmers in connection with their main agricultural activity [9]. Farms offering agritourism activities are more likely to implement agri-environmental measures, which creates a "fertile alliance" between agriculture and tourism that can contribute to the protection of traditional landscapes and biodiversity, responding to tourists' desire to enjoy authentic and well-preserved rural environments [7].

Apulian agritourism has benefited from public investments aimed at stimulating multifunctionality and the creation of quality tourism experiences in the region's inland areas [10]. A study on the nearby municipality of Vico del Gargano highlights the importance of considering traditional agricultural landscapes as "cultural landscapes" to be enhanced through sustainable tourism [11]. The challenge in these contexts is to bring economic, social, cultural, and environmental capital into equal footing, maintaining their balance [11].

Regarding innovation in the sector, Palmi and Lezzi propose the concept of "tradition-based innovation" in agritourism businesses in Salento, embracing a multifunctional vision of sustainability, capturing the key factors for value creation across the three

dimensions of sustainability (economic, socio-cultural, and environmental) [1]. The so-called "Pyramid of Public Value" models suggest identifying key impacts in different well-being domains - consistent with the BES indicators adopted at the national level - and assessing the contribution of policies or interventions to improving these outcomes [12]. In the case of policies for rural areas, relevant outcomes include, for example, inclusive economic growth, employment, social cohesion, cultural heritage, and environmental protection [12].

EXPERIMENTAL

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire, administered directly to the farm managers. The questionnaire included sections dedicated to: (A) Corporate identity and services offered; (B) Tourism and economic data; (C) Social and cultural value (D) Environmental value (E) Institutional relations and public funds (F) Future vision and need for public support. Responses were collected in writing, using open-ended and short-answer questions, obtaining both quantitative data and detailed qualitative descriptions.

In parallel, an analysis of secondary sources was conducted to contextualize and corroborate the case study findings. Specifically, official statistics (ISTAT, ISMEA) and regional institutional documents were used to compare company data with industry trends at the regional and national levels [2, 5]. A literature review was conducted to identify literature and theoretical models relevant to the four value dimensions considered. These scientific and institutional sources allowed for the triangulation of information, strengthening the validity of the results through the comparison of manager perceptions, internal numerical data, and external indicators.

The data analysis was primarily descriptive and qualitative, with some quantitative elements. The questionnaire information was categorized according to the four dimensions of public value. Key findings emerging from the case study were identified and compared with any benchmarks or references drawn from the literature. Some quantitative data have been summarized in tables and figures to facilitate understanding. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 below illustrate, respectively, the composition of annual visits at Masseria Casacapanna between accommodations and food

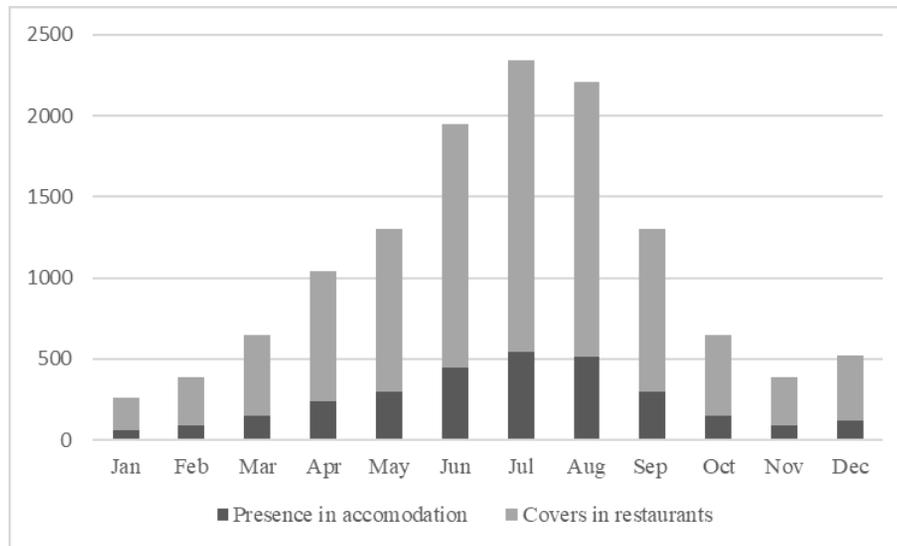


Fig. 1. Comparison between annual accommodation occupancy (overnight stays) and annual restaurant cover charges at Masseria Casacapanna (average over recent years).

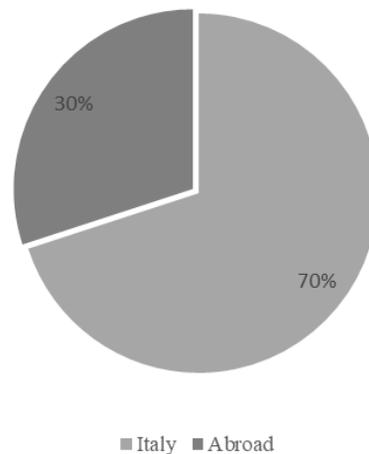


Fig. 2. Percentage composition of customers by geographical origin (Italy vs. Abroad).

services, and the percentage composition of guests by geographic origin.

Case study: Masseria Casacapanna

Territorial context

Masseria Casacapanna is in the municipality of Chieuti, in the province of Foggia, in the upper Tavoliere of Apulia. Originally founded in the 19th century as an extensive farmhouse within a noble estate, Casacapanna served as a local agricultural stronghold for decades. Today, Masseria Casacapanna is a multifunctional, full-

service agritourism facility, offering an integrated range of services: agritourism hospitality; locally sourced food; private events; recreation; educational activities; direct sales and processing; agri-camping for campers and caravans; tourist services. The farm also collaborates with external operators for specialized services, such as tourist guides for excursions and agronomists for agro-environmental consultancy.

Approximately 70 % of the masseria's annual guests are Italian, while the rest are mostly European. The summer months (June - August) and spring and autumn

weekends see peak attendance for both stays and events, while activity slows on winter weekdays. Masseria Casacapanna currently averages approximately 3 000 overnight stays and 10 000 meals per year for catering. The company's revenue is growing steadily (5 - 7 % annually from 2015 to today).

The company has benefited from significant public development grants. Specifically, a non-repayable grant from the Apulia Regional Development Programme (PSR) in 2012 totalling approximately €380 000 (equivalent to 50 % of the investment) enabled the construction of the swimming pool, the expansion of the restaurant, and the modernization of the rooms.

Analysis of the public value generated

This section analyses in detail the impacts of Masseria Casacapanna according to the four identified dimensions of public value: economic, social, environmental, and cultural.

Economic dimension

Employment and Income: Approximately 75 % of the food products used by the masseria come from local or regional suppliers, in addition to those produced internally. This means that agritourism actively supports nearby farms through zero-mile supplies. This integration with the short supply chain enhances typical local products (e.g., Dauno DOP olive oil, Tavoliere DOC wine) and increases the local added value for every euro spent by tourists.

By attracting tourists to a little-known rural area, agritourism generates visitor flows that also benefit other local operators. In Apulia, it is estimated that in 2022, there were 191 000 agritourism arrivals (46 % foreigners) for 600 000 overnight stays, and that the agritourism experience extends the average stay to 3.5 days - a sign of greater satisfaction and higher spending per visitor compared to "hit-and-run" tourism [2].

The Covid-19 pandemic experience showed that farms with agritourism activities demonstrated greater resilience than those without diversified activities [13]. Despite the lockdowns, many Apulian masserias maintained a minimum level of activity by offering takeout food or focusing on local domestic tourism. The literature indicates that diversification into non-agricultural activities such as agritourism is a resilience strategy for small businesses.

Social dimension

By organizing events open to the public and participating in local events, the masseria enriches the socio-cultural offerings of a small town otherwise lacking recreational spaces. For example, the managers actively participate in the Festival of San Giorgio by setting up food stands with farm products and supporting the historical reenactment. They have also launched traditional cooking courses for residents to teach local recipes.

Each year, Masseria Casacapanna hosts numerous school visits from the area (Chieuti, Serracapriola, San Severo) as part of educational programs coordinated with the teachers. It collaborates with the GAL Daunia Rurale, participating in rural tourism circuits and hosting conferences on local development.

By offering genuine, locally sourced foods and the traditional Mediterranean diet, agritourism spreads a healthy eating style. Palmi and Lezzi cite, among the social benefits of agritourism, its contribution to the health and psychophysical well-being of guests; this also applies to local visitors, who find the masseria a healthy and community-based living environment [1].

Masseria Casacapanna employs local seasonal workers, sometimes young people with their first work experience, contributing to their professional training. It collaborates with other producers without competitive attitudes, instead promoting their products. This reflects the findings of several international studies, namely that rural tourism can facilitate urban-rural dialogue and strengthen social institutions in villages through interaction with visitors [8].

Environmental dimension

Although it is not (yet) certified organic, the farm adopts an agricultural management system inspired by agroecology. This includes intelligent crop rotations, natural grassing and mulching of the soil, and an Integrated Pest Management approach with pest monitoring and targeted interventions only when critical thresholds are exceeded. These practices reduce soil erosion, improve soil structure and biodiversity, and minimize the use of pesticides. Literature confirms that agritourism often generates a richer mosaic of landscapes than intensive monocultures, with positive effects on soils and ecosystems [7].

Since 2012, solar thermal panels for domestic hot

water and a small wind generator have been installed, as well as a photovoltaic system with battery storage. An electric vehicle charging station is also being installed. The masseria uses a streamlined irrigation system based on meteorological and water balance data, while monitoring consumption and internal water networks to prevent leaks. Waste management is achieved through a separate waste collection and upstream reduction of packaging, favoring reusable materials.

The active presence of the masseria in the area ensures the continuous maintenance of a rural area that would otherwise risk abandonment. Giordano's research cited how it is difficult to imagine tourists wishing to visit degraded countryside or reduced to anonymous intensive expanses [7]. On the contrary, well-maintained traditional countryside offers the authentic experience of ancient values, flavors, and aromas that attracts slow tourism.

Cultural dimension

Masseria Casacapanna is actively committed to keeping local rural and gastronomic traditions alive, integrating them into the guest experience. All dishes served in the farmhouse restaurant are inspired by traditional recipes from Apulia and Molise, and the staff explains the origins of the recipes. Palmi and Lezzi highlight how the rediscovery of rural heritage and its innovative reinterpretation can generate new value and make agritourism offerings distinctive [1].

The masseria has set up a sort of small open-air peasant museum in the farmyard, displaying over 20 vintage agricultural tools that belonged to the farm's grandparents, accompanied by bilingual explanatory panels. This allows visitors to visually understand ancient farming methods (e.g., the wheat cycle, traditional winemaking), contextualizing them in the place where they historically occurred. Inside the rooms and common areas, local artisanal handmade items are displayed, incorporating typical decorative motifs passed down through the generations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From an academic and theoretical perspective, the case study demonstrates the usefulness of applying the public value paradigm to rural entrepreneurial ventures. Traditionally, public value is a concept referring to public

administrations, but the growing emphasis on public-private co-creation implies recognizing that market actors can also contribute to collective well-being [14]. The masseria's results support this view: despite being a for-profit enterprise, by pursuing excellence and rooting itself in the local context, it has indirectly "focused" its performance on public objectives. This alignment between private and public value is a strength of the Italian agritourism model: as Palmi and Lezzi state, "the benefits of agritourism are not limited to private gain but generate social benefits and the recovery of authenticity that produce public value" [1].

Casacapanna is planning to expand its accommodation capacity and hire marketing specialists to promote the masseria in foreign markets. However, the analysis shows that growth and sustainability are not mutually exclusive in this sector: indeed, the adoption of innovative practices can improve environmental and social performance. For example, Casacapanna could implement environmental or agritourism quality certifications that allow it to better monitor its impacts and communicate its added value even more effectively; many agritourism firms in Italy are adopting integrated quality systems to focus on sustainability and gain market recognition [15].

Below, we provide a table summarizing the main multidimensional impacts found in the case study and some possible lines of policy intervention to maximize these impacts (Table 1).

As the table shows, public policies play an enabling role on all fronts: targeted financial contributions, reducing administrative barriers, creating networks and certifications, and involving agritourism businesses in socio-cultural planning. A key message that emerged is the need for an integrated and intersectoral approach: agritourism is not just agriculture or tourism, but also involves social, environmental, and cultural policies.

A virtuous example cited by interviewees is the unified promotion of agritourism by Pugliapromozione (the regional tourism agency): including farms in tourist packages and international fairs gives these businesses visibility. Investing in this coordinated promotion is an important policy suggestion because it increases demand and therefore the economic sustainability of businesses that generate public value, creating a virtuous circle.

From the perspective of the local community and stakeholders, the results indicate that a multifunctional

Table 1. Summary of the impacts generated by Masseria Casacapanna in the various dimensions of public value and possible policy measures suggested to amplify them.

Dimension	Value generated by Masseria Casacapanna	Possible policy interventions
Economical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 family members, 5 permanent employees, 25 seasonal workers; - 3000 annual tourist stays, 10000 restaurant visits; - 75 % local supplies; - 5 - 7 % sales growth since 2015; - Involvement in tourism services, traditional retail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue non-repayable funding for agritourism. - Simplify bureaucracy in agritourism. - Promote local business networks for economies of scale in marketing and purchasing. - Provide training on diversification and seasonal adjustment.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dozens of educational visits annually. - 60 events per year as a community space host. - Traditional food courses offered. - Support for public events. - Recreational space made available to local families. - Integration into local networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support educational and social farms with dedicated calls for proposals. - Tax incentives for agritourism businesses offering community services. - Involve agritourism businesses in social plans as partners for inclusion projects (e.g., horticultural therapy, internships for people with disabilities). - Promote school-agritourism agreements to include rural visits in school curricula.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 50 % electricity needs covered by photovoltaic/wind energy. - Solar system for hot water. - Optimized irrigation with weather station. - Integrated pest management in the olive grove. - Increased waste separation. - Eco-friendly maintenance methods of 60+ hectares. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contributions for PV panels and storage on off-grid agritourism businesses. - Regional “Sustainable Agritourism” certification programs with criteria for green marketing. - Incentivize EV charging stations and soft mobility - Offer training on agrivoltaics and agroforestry techniques.

agroecological agritourism can become a cornerstone of participatory local development. It would be desirable for local authorities to formally recognize this role, involving agritourism businesses in decision-making processes (e.g., territorial planning discussions) and supporting them during critical phases (bureaucratic simplification, promotion).

Reflecting on the methodological limitations of the research, we acknowledge that the results come from a single case in a favourable context and that some assessments were qualitative and subjective in nature. Future studies could expand the sample to include agritourism in various regions and socioeconomic contexts, applying the same analytical framework to

verify whether the observed impacts are generalizable. Unfortunately, such data is not always available, but collaboration with research institutions and universities could help fill this gap.

CONCLUSIONS

Through a case study methodology - integrating primary data with secondary sources - we have highlighted how a multifunctional agritourism farm can positively impact a variety of dimensions: local economic growth, social cohesion and community services, environmental protection and ecological innovation, and cultural and identity enhancement.

Among the key implications that emerged is the need to recognize and adequately support the multifaceted role of agritourism. Institutions should consider agritourism not only as economic operators, but as partners in the creation of public value, adopting co-design approaches and joint impact measurement. Tools such as the PIAO, currently mandatory for public administrations, could inspire the formulation of “public value plans” for agritourism networks as well, setting improvement targets (e.g., increasing youth employment, reducing emissions, number of cultural events) and monitoring them with specific indicators.

Furthermore, it is appropriate to continue providing financial support to these businesses: the evidence that targeted public investments have a high multiplier in terms of local benefits strengthens the justification for policies such as non-repayable grants from the RDP and the Leader funds, and encourages exploiting the new opportunities offered by the PNRR (which, for example, through initiatives such as “Attractiveness of Villages” and “Tourism 4.0,” could involve agritourism businesses in pilot projects of excellence).

From an operational perspective, the findings provide recommendations for agritourism entrepreneurs themselves and their trade associations. Investing in the quality and authenticity of the experience offered, establishing roots in local supply chains, collaborating with local organizations and associations, and diversifying services by focusing on education, culture, and ecotourism prove to be winning strategies both for the business’s economic sustainability and for maximizing the positive impacts generated. Trade associations should promote the dissemination of these best practices and facilitate the exchange of experiences between agritourism businesses in different regions, creating a learning community focused on sustainability and innovation.

From a scientific research perspective, this work partially fills a gap by studying the impacts of agritourism from an integrated perspective and introducing the public value framework in this area. Several avenues for further exploration remain open: extending the analysis to larger samples to validate the results; developing quantitative metrics of sectoral impact (e.g., a composite index of “public performance” for agritourism); and investigating potential negative effects or trade-offs. Another interesting avenue would be to evaluate the contribution

of agritourism to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The results suggest a contribution to SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 15 (life on land), and, indirectly, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities but focused on rural communities).

Acknowledgments

This study is funded by the European Union-NextGenerationEU, through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, project № BG-RRP-2.004-0002, “BiOrgaMCT”.

Authors’ contributions

All data is collected and interpreted by Petya Romanova.

REFERENCES

1. P. Palmi, G. E. Lezzi, How authenticity and tradition shift into sustainability and innovation: evidence from Italian agritourism, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 17, 5389, 2020.
2. National Institute of Statistics - Agritourism businesses in Italy - year 2023, February 7, 2025. <https://www.istat.it/comunicato-stampa/le-aziende-agrituristiche-in-italia-anno-2023/>, Available 16.11.2025 (in Italian)
3. CIA - Italian farmers, Agritourism, an expanding sector in Puglia: more opportunities from the new law, May 15, 2024. <https://cia-puglia.it/2024/05/15/agriturismi-settore-in-espansione-in-puglia-piu-opportunita-dalla-nuova-legge/>, Available 16.11.2025 (in Italian)
4. Coldiretti Puglia, Agritourism: worth 20 % of the regional agricultural GDP; slow tourism boom (+ 45 %), 2024. <https://brindisi.coldiretti.it/news/agriturismo-vale-20-pil-agricolo-regionale-boom-turismo-lento-45/>, Available 16.11.2025 (in Italian)
5. ISMEA, National network of rural regions, agritourism and multifunctionality of the agricultural company - tools and techniques for management, Operating manual, October 2016. https://www.reterurale.it/downloads/Agriturismo_multifunzionalit%C3%A0.

- pdf Available 16.11.2025 (in Italian)
6. E.D. Gagliardo, Performance as a lever for creating public value, Public Value Research Center, FPA Annual Report, 2024, 79-84. <https://www.valorepubblico.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/fpa-annual-report-2024-il-contributo-di-enrico-deidda-gagliardo-sul-valore-pubblico.pdf>, Available 16.11.2025 (in Italian)
 7. V. Giaccio, L. Mastronardi, D. Marino, A. Giannelli, A. Scardera, Do rural policies impact on tourism development in Italy? a case study of agritourism, *Sustainability*, 10, 8, 2938, 2018.
 8. F. Schiavone, H. El Bilali, S. Berjan, A. L. Zheliaskov, Rural Tourism in Apulia Region, Italy: Results of 2007 - 2013 Rural Development Programme and 2020 Perspectives. *AGROFOR International Journal*, 1, 1, 2016, 16-29.
 9. Italian Law 20 February 2006, n.96, Discipline of the agritourism. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/ita203216english.pdf>, Available 16.11.2025
 10. A. Mirò, D. Caruso, Tourist experiences in rural tourism: a case study from Puglia region, *International Journal of Digital Culture and Electronic Tourism*, 2,2,103, 2017.
 11. S. Giordano, Agrarian landscapes: from marginal areas to cultural landscapes-paths to sustainable tourism in small villages-the case of Vico Del Gargano in the club of the Borghi più belli d'ItaliaA, *Qual Quant*, 54, 2020, 1725-1744.
 12. L. Papi, R. Ievoli, G. Gobbo, E. D. Gagliardo, F. Bacchini, Public value as a driving force for finalizing the supply chain performance of ministries towards fair and sustainable well-being, *Azienda Pubblica*, 4, 2020, 339-362, (in Italian).
 13. B. Zanetti, M. Verrascina, F. Licciardo, G. Gargano, Agritourism and farm diversification in Italy: what have we learnt from COVID-19? *Land*, 11, 8, 1215, 2022.
 14. E.D. Gagliardo, R. Saporito, The PIAO as an integrated programming tool for the creation of public value, *Italian Journal of Public Management*, 4, 2, 2021, (in Italian).
 15. F. Tedioli, Exploring Italian agritourism: a model of sustainable rural development, *Journal of Agribusiness and Rural Development*, 1,75, 2025, 64-77.