

Heritage preservation: is it a motivation for agritourism entrepreneurship?

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Abstract

Objectives. *Previous studies on agritourism entrepreneurship have identified a variety of economic and non-economic motivations driving farm operators to start the agritourism activity. Nonetheless, local heritage preservation and enhancement have been completely overlooked. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether “heritage preservation and enhancement” (in its three facets related to: tangible rural heritage; agrifood heritage; rural way of life heritage) is a specific non-economic motivation for agritourism entrepreneurship.*

Methodology. *A survey on a sample of 226 Italian agritourism operators was conducted in March 2015. Data were first analysed through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and then through the importance-performance analysis (IPA).*

Findings. *The results show that there are 5 different groups of motivations to start the agritourism business, namely: i) economic motivations; ii) personal and family-related motivations; iii) tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement; iv) agrifood heritage preservation and enhancement; v) rural way of life heritage preservation and enhancement. Hence “heritage preservation and enhancement” (in its three facets) has a pivotal role and it is more important than economic motivations. Similarly operators are more satisfied for having contributed to heritage preservation than for having obtained economic benefits from the agritourism activity.*

Research limits. *Caution should be paid before extending these results to countries other than Italy (where, for example, agrifood heritage has a strong and peculiar tradition and connection with the territory).*

Practical implications. *Operators are well aware of their contribution to the preservation and enhancement of local heritage but also perceive that tourists are not always able to appreciate the value of this contribution and have misconceptions about the essence of agritourism. This may be the result also of the use of the label “agritourism” to indicate offerings (such as agri-spas or basic accommodation services) which do not primarily focus on the link with local heritage. Therefore, it is important that “authentic agritourism” operators that focus on heritage (in its three facets) are able to share the efforts to make potential guests aware about the uniqueness of their offering, emphasizing the strong link with the local heritage.*

Originality of the study. *This is the first study in the literature stream about agritourism entrepreneurship to demonstrate that locale heritage preservation and enhancement is a distinct, key motivation for agritourism operators.*

Key words: *agritourism; farms; tourism; heritage; rural tourism*

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1. Introduction

Drawing on the increasing popularity of agritourism, several studies have recently examined both the agritourism operators' motivations to start their business (i.e., the expected benefits) and the actual level of accomplishment of those goals (i.e. the perceived benefits) (e.g., Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

Previous analyses have highlighted that the drivers of agritourism entrepreneurship can be divided into economic and non-economic motivations. As regards the economic motivations, agritourism may compensate for fluctuations in agricultural income and generate additional revenues. Several non-economic motivations have been identified, as well, including: social motivations (e.g., educating people about farming), personal motivations (e.g., providing a new challenge for the operator's own career), and family-related motivations (e.g. enhance the farm operator's family quality of life) (Barbieri, 2010; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

To the authors' knowledge, none of the studies about agritourism entrepreneurship has specifically considered "heritage preservation and enhancement" as a motivation to start this business. Interestingly, there are evidences that agritourism entrepreneurs actually contribute through their activity to heritage preservation and enhancement. For example a recent study (LaPan and Barbieri, 2014) has shown that over one third of agritourism farms have preserved tangible heritage (such as historic buildings and antique equipment) on their farms. Hence the purpose of this paper is to assess whether "heritage preservation and enhancement" is a distinct motivation behind agritourism entrepreneurship. In particular, this paper analyzes three facets of heritage: tangible rural heritage, agrifood heritage, rural way of life heritage. More in detail, this study intends to:

- 1) assess whether "heritage preservation and enhancement" is a motivation for agritourism entrepreneurship, in addition to the economic and non-economic motivations highlighted in previous studies;
- 2) establish the perceived importance of "heritage preservation and enhancement" as a motivation to start the agritourism business (and compare it with the importance of the other motivations);
- 3) evaluate to what extent farm operators perceive that they were successful in accomplishing their goal of heritage preservation and enhancement (i.e. evaluating the perceived performance of "heritage preservation and enhancement").

To answer to these research questions, a survey among a sample of 226 Italian agritourism farms has been conducted. Previous studies on the motivations behind agritourism entrepreneurship have been mainly carried out in Australia (Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007), Canada (Barbieri, 2010) and USA (McGehee and Kim, 2004; Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

The Italian setting has some distinct features that have the potential to enhance available knowledge about agritourism operators' motivations. First, food heritage and (rural) tourism are strongly intertwined in Italy (Buffa and Martini, 2012; Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000). Such strong geographical and historical links between agrifood products and their territories are demonstrated by the remarkable number of Italian products (269) included in the European Union (EU) Database of Origin and Registration, which is the EU database for foodstuffs registered as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) (Qualivita & Ismea, 2014). Second, Italy has particularly rich rural heritage, such as stone-made buildings, traditional techniques of land-management, etc. (Cullotta and Barbera, 2011). Third, the average farm size in Italy is much smaller -10.5 hectares (Istat, 2010)- as compared to the other contexts where previous studies took place (e.g., 133 hectares in the case of Tew and Barbieri's 2012 research). On this point, previous studies have shown that the importance of personal and economic motivations is significantly related to the farm's size (Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section the concept of agritourism and the results of the main studies about agritourism operators' motivations are

reviewed. After that, the methodology of this research is presented and the results are described. Discussion, conclusions and limitations complete this paper.

2. Literature review and purpose of this study

Despite the relevance of agritourism, an agreed upon definition of this phenomenon still not exists in international tourism research. For this reason, in the last few years, several scholars (Arroyo *et al.*, 2013; Flanigan *et al.*, 2014; Phillip *et al.*, 2010) have tried to develop a shared definition and to solve inconsistencies related to the use of a variety of labels, such as agritourism, farm tourism, farm-based tourism and vacation farms (for a detailed overview of the definitions used in the literature for agritourism and related labels, see Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock (2010)).

As a results of these efforts, the following definition has been suggested for agritourism: “Farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes” (Arroyo *et al.*, 2013, p. 45). This definition includes agritourism products based either on a working farm or on a different agricultural setting. Consistently with this definition Flanigan *et al.* (2014) suggest the following typology:

- 1) Agritourism based on a working farm:
 - 1a) Working farm, indirect interaction agritourism (e.g. farmhouse accommodation);
 - 1b) Working farm, direct staged interaction agritourism (e.g. model farm);
 - 1c) Working farm, direct authentic interaction agritourism (e.g. guests’ participation in farm tasks).
- 2) Agritourism not based on a working farm:
 - 2a) Non-working farm, indirect interaction agritourism (e.g. accommodation in ex-farmhouse);
 - 2b) Non-working farm, direct interaction agritourism (e.g. farming museums).

In this study only the agritourism based on a working farm is considered, consistent with the Italian research context. In fact, in Italy agritourism is strictly defined by current regulation (law n. 96/2006) as “the hospitality activities practiced by agricultural entrepreneurs [...] through the use of their firms, in connection with the farming activities, the forestry-related activities, and livestock activities”, with the limitation that “agricultural activities prevail [over the agritourism activities]”. Therefore, in Italy hospitality activities which are not based on a working farm, can’t be defined as agritourism activities.

After having introduced the concept of agritourism, we now focus on the agritourism operator’s perspective and, in particular, on the motivations behind her/his decision to start this business. Both economic and non-economic motivations have been identified. As for the economic aspects, the possibility of generating additional income, decreasing revenue seasonal fluctuations (i.e. off-season revenue generation) and reducing the impact of catastrophic events on the farm revenues have been highlighted (McGehee and Kim, 2004). As for the non-economic aspects, despite the different labels used in available literature, two main groups of factors can be recognized. The first group includes social motivations (Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007), also labeled as “market opportunities” (Barbieri, 2010; Tew and Barbieri, 2012), such as the opportunity to interact with guests and educate them about farming. The second group of non-economic motivations covers personal and family-related aspects, stressing the farmer’s intention to improve the quality of life of the family and to capitalize on a personal interest or hobby (Barbieri, 2010). The results from the mentioned studies show that in some cases economic motivations prevail over non-economic motivations (Barbieri, 2010; McGehee and Kim, 2004), but in other contexts operators are mainly driven by non-economic goals (Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

Interestingly, previous studies have not considered “heritage preservation and enhancement” as a suitable non-economic motivations for agritourism entrepreneurship. Nonetheless it’s self-evident that agritourism operators have an active role in heritage preservation and enhancement (LaPan and Barbieri, 2014). Moreover heritage is fundamental for rural tourism products, which should be

based on experiential benefits, active participation (Pencarelli and Forlani, 2002) and authenticity (Buffa and Martini, 2012; Cerquetti, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to test whether “heritage preservation and enhancement” emerges as a distinct motivation driving operators to start this business and to assess its importance. In particular, we consider three facets of “heritage preservation and enhancement”:

- tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement: it includes the preservation and enhancement of historic buildings, such as mills, or antique equipment, such as tractors or other tools (LaPan and Barbieri, 2014);
- agrifood heritage preservation and enhancement: it includes the preservation and enhancement of typical local agrifood and cuisine (Bessiere and Tibere, 2013). Some authors even remark how, in a broader sense, the whole cultural heritage of the territory is embedded in these products (Tamma, 2010);
- rural way of life heritage preservation and enhancement: it is about the preservation and enhancement of the rural landscape, habits, and traditional types of cultivations and the intention to educate guests about these aspects. Therefore it also includes the social motivations already highlighted by previous studies (Barbieri, 2010; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

Hence, by combining, the motivations identified by previous studies with those suggested in this paper, 5 groups of motivations emerge. Tab. 1 shows these 5 groups, together with the specific motivations belonging to each of them.

Tab. 1: Motivations to start the agritourism activities

Motivations	Source
<i>A. Economic motivations</i> 1. Generate additional revenues 2. Decrease seasonal revenue fluctuations 3. Reduce the impact of catastrophic events	McGehee and Kim, 2004; Barbieri, 2010; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Tew and Barbieri, 2012.
<i>B. Personal and family-related motivations</i> 4. Provide a working opportunity for the family 5. Enhance family quality of life 6. Realize a dream/a personal interest 7. Provide a new challenge for the operator’s career	McGehee and Kim, 2004; Barbieri, 2010; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Tew and Barbieri, 2012.
<i>C. Tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement</i> 8. Preserve and enhance historic rural buildings (e.g., mills, silos, etc.) 9. Preserve and enhance antique rural equipment (e.g., tractors, tools, etc.)	This study.
<i>D. Agrifood heritage preservation and enhancement</i> 10. Preserve and enhance typical local food 11. Preserve and enhance typical local cuisine 12. Preserve and enhance the local wine & food richness	This study.
<i>E. Rural way of life heritage preservation and enhancement</i> (which includes motivations already labeled as “social” by previous studies) 13. Educate the public about the rural world 14. Establish authentic relationships with guests 15. Make other people know the beauty of the territory 16. Contribute to the preservation of the landscape 17. Preserve and enhance traditional types of cultivations	This study and McGehee and Kim, 2004; Barbieri, 2010; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Tew and Barbieri, 2012.

Source: our analysis

The purpose of this paper is to test whether the suggested 5 groups of motivations emerge as distinct factors in the perceptions of agritourism operators. In addition, the importance and the level of accomplishment of the 5 motivations will be evaluated with the intent of highlighting the specific role of “heritage preservation and enhancement”, articulated in its three suggested facets (related to: tangible rural heritage; agrifood heritage; rural way of life heritage).

3. Methodology

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted among a sample of 226 Italian agritourism farms. In Italy, the number of agritourism farms has been rapidly increasing in the last decade, from 13,019 in 2003 to 20,897 in 2013 (Istat, 2014). 48% of them are located in the north of Italy, 34.2% in the center and 17.8% in the south (including Sardinia and Sicily) (Istat, 2014). The sampling list was drawn from the provincial and regional public lists of Italian agritourism farms, following the geographical sampling technique. In detail, we created a sample of 2,000 agritourism farms (i.e., 9.5% of the population of the 20,897 Italian agritourism farms), of which 960 (48%) were located in the north of Italy, 684 (34.2%) in the center and 356 (17.8%) in the south. We then collected the e-mail addresses for all the 2,000 agritourism farms. The survey was distributed online in March 2015. The respondents were sent a description of the research aims and a link to an online questionnaire. Overall we received 237 questionnaires; however, 11 were deleted due to incomplete answers. The final sample was composed of 226 agritourism farms, giving a response rate of 11.3%, which compares favorably with rates reported in previous online surveys among hospitality operators (Tavitiyaman *et al.*, 2012).

The questionnaire was developed drawing on previous studies (e.g., Tew and Barbieri, 2012) and included questions in the following areas: farm profile (number of years receiving visitors, percentage contribution of the agritourism activities to the total revenues of the farm, number of people working on the farm, types of recreational activities and hospitality services offered by the farm); importance of each of the 17 motivations listed in table 1 to start the agritourism activities (the perceived importance of each motivation was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not important at all; 5=very important); the perception of the satisfaction (i.e. the level of accomplishment) with each of the 5 groups of motivations (assessed through 5-point Likert scales, 1 = very unsatisfied to 5 = very satisfied). In addition, free spaces were given to the operators to write any additional comments about their experience with agritourism.

Data analysis was conducted following this procedure. First we performed a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the 17 motivations to verify whether the expected 5 groups of motivations emerged as distinct factors (Brown, 2006). After that we completed the importance-performance analysis (IPA) (Azzopardi and Nash, 2013; Martilla and James, 1977): for each of the 5 groups of motivations, the average importance and the performance were evaluated and plotted on the traditional two-dimensional IPA grid.

4. Results

Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of the characteristics of the agritourism farms included in the sample. Most of them are located in the north and in the center of Italy, and have from 1 to 5 employees. Only a small portion of the farms started agritourism activities before 2000, but these activities currently, on average, contribute for a significant portion of the total revenues of the farm.

Tab. 2: Profile of the responding farms

	Frequencies (n=226)
Area	
North	101 (44.7%)
Center	93 (41.1%)
South (including Sardinia and Sicily)	32 (14.2%)
Year starting offering agritourism	
2010-2014	55 (24.3%)
2005-2009	57 (25.2%)
2000-2004	65 (28.8%)
1990-1999	37 (16.4%)
1980-1989	12 (5.3%)
% Contribution of the agritourism activities to the total revenues of the farm	
<10%	27 (12.0%)
11-20%	32 (14.1%)
21-30%	38 (16.8%)
31-40%	49 (21.7%)
More than 40%	80 (35.4%)
Number of Employees	
From 1 to 2	99 (43.8%)
From 3 to 5	79 (35.0%)
From 6 to 20	48 (21.2%)

Source: our analysis

Tab. 3: Recreational activities and hospitality services offered by the farm

Activities and services offered	Frequencies (n=226)
Accommodation	204 (90.3%)
Food services (including wine/food tasting)	126 (55.7%)
Sport activities	68 (30.0%)
Leisure tours	109 (48.2%)
Educational activities	76 (33.6%)
Health-related and wellness-related services	19 (8.4%)
Spaces and services for business events, weddings, etc.	105 (46.5%)
Agri-camping	23 (10.2%)
Sales of own products	180 (79.7%)
Sales of own certified typical products	81 (35.8%)
Participation to agricultural activities	77 (34.0%)
Others	35 (15.4%)

Source: our analysis

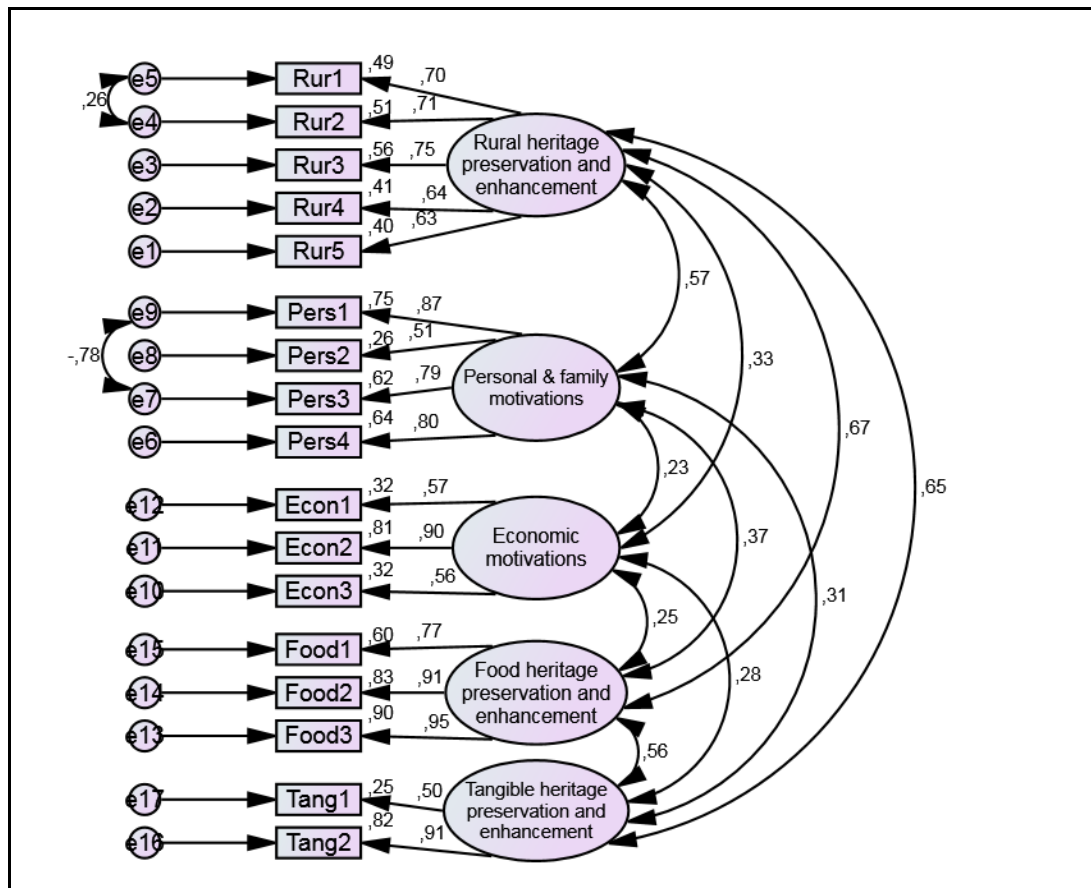
We then performed a Confirmatory Factor Analysis to verify whether the 17 motivations suggested in the previous sections would group in the 5 expected factors. The CFA's overall goodness of fit is acceptable (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012) with Chi-square(df=107)= 237.307; CFI=0.926 and RMSEA=0.074). Table 4 and Fig. 1 show the detailed estimated values. Data highlight that the 5 expected factors have both convergent and discriminant validity. These results confirm that, as suggested, there are 5 different groups of motivations to start the agritourism business, namely: economic motivations, personal and family-related motivations, tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement, agrifood heritage preservation and enhancement and rural way of life heritage preservation and enhancement.

Tab. 4: The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Item	Me an	S.D.	C.R.	Factor Loading
Economic motivations AVE:0.48; C.R.: 0.72	Econ1 - Generate additional revenues	3.94	1.17	/	.57
	Econ2 - Decrease seasonal revenue fluctuations	3.25	1.35	6.21	.90
	Econ3 - Reduce the impact of catastrophic events	2.31	1.33	6.56	.56
Personal and family-related motivations AVE:0.56; C.R.: 0.83	Pers1 - Provide a working opportunity for my family	4.08	1.14	/	.87
	Pers2 - Enhance my family quality of life	3.55	1.31	7.46	.51
	Pers3 - Realize a dream/a personal interest	3.82	1.33	9.84	.79
	Pers4 - Provide a new challenge for my own career	3.78	1.21	11.14	.80
Tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement AVE:0.53; C.R.: 0.68	Tang1 - Preserve and enhance historic rural buildings (e.g., mills, silos, etc.)	4.02	1.19	/	.50
	Tang2 - Preserve and enhance antique rural equipment (e.g., tractors, tools, etc.)	2.92	1.37	5.31	.91
Agrifood heritage preservation and enhancement AVE:0.77; C.R.: 0.91	Food1 - Preserve and enhance typical local food	3.59	1.35	/	.77
	Food2 - Preserve and enhance typical local cuisine	3.32	1.49	15.33	.91
	Food3 - Preserve and enhance the local wine & food richness	3.42	1.44	15.80	.95
Rural way of life heritage preservation and enhancement AVE:0.47; C.R.: 0.81	Rur1 - Educate the public about the rural world	3.25	1.36	/	.70
	Rur2 - Establish authentic relationships with guests	3.84	1.22	11.16	.71
	Rur3 - Make other people know the beauty of the territory	4.10	1.13	9.79	.75
	Rur4 - Contribute to the preservation of the landscape	3.76	1.11	8.55	.64
	Rur5 - Preserve and enhance traditional types of cultivations	3.11	1.40	8.41	.63

Source: our analysis

Fig. 1: The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis



Source: our analysis

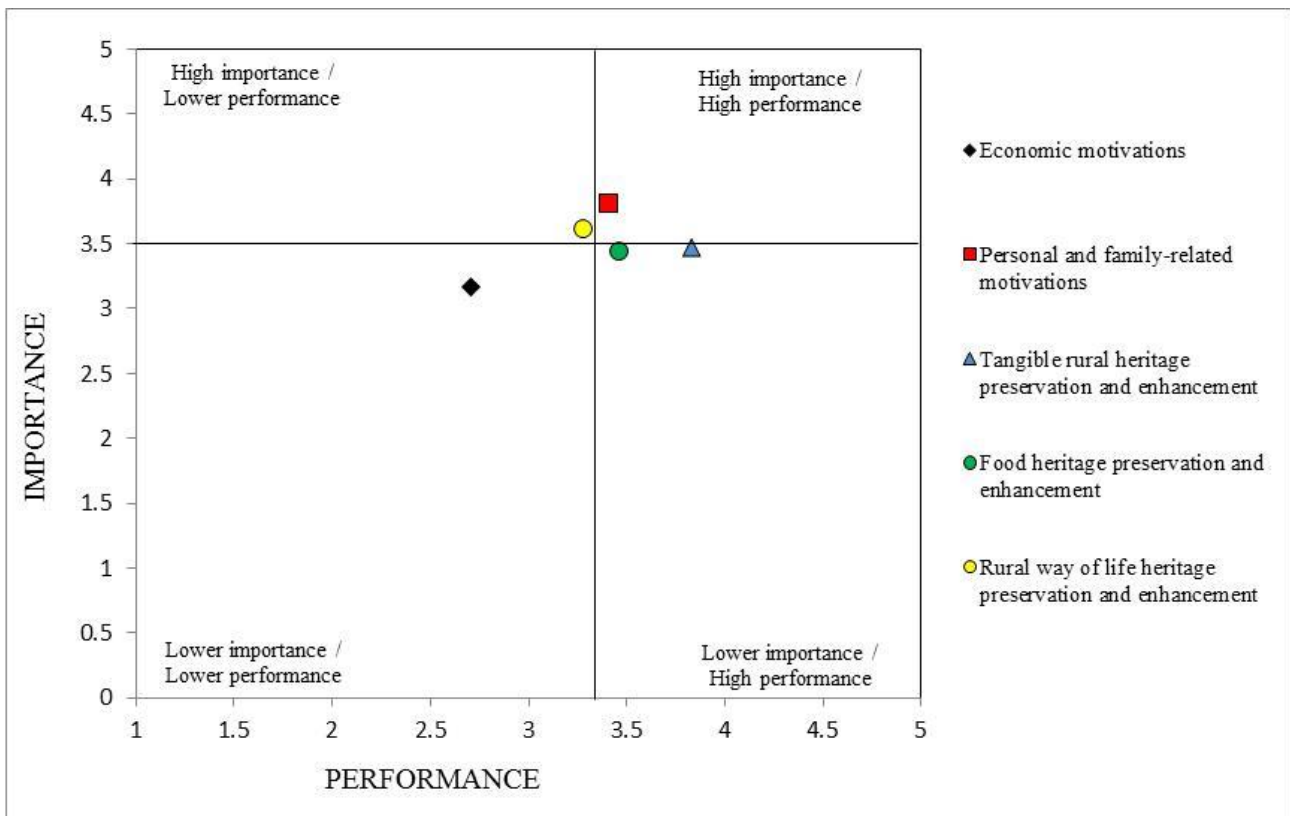
After that, we conducted the IPA analysis, by considering the average rating for each of the 5 group of motivations together with operators’ satisfaction (i.e. the level of accomplishment) with each of them (tab. 5). The results were then plotted on the traditional two-dimensional IPA grid (fig. 2), using the mean values of the importance and of the performance ratings to determine cross-hair points (Azzopardi and Nash, 2013).

Tab. 5: The results of the importance-performance analysis (IPA)

Motivations	Importance	Performance
Economic motivations	3.17	2.71
Personal and family-related motivations	3.81	3.41
Tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement	3.47	3.83
Agrifood heritage preservation and enhancement	3.44	3.46
Rural way of life heritage preservation and enhancement	3.61	3.28

Source: our analysis

Fig. 2: The results of the importance-performance analysis (IPA)



Source: our analysis

The results show that non-economic motivations are more important than the economic ones. In particular, all the three facets of heritage preservation and enhancement (related to: tangible heritage, agrifood heritage and rural way of life heritage) have a medium-to-high level of importance (from 3.44 to 3.61). Moreover “tangible rural heritage preservation and enhancement” shows the highest level of accomplishment, demonstrating that operators perceive that they successfully contributed to preserve and enhance tangible heritage through their activity.

5. Discussion and implications

The results clearly indicate that “heritage preservation and enhancement” is a strong antecedent of the operators’ decision to start the agritourism activity. The interpretation of the rich free comments provided by the interviewees shows how agritourism entrepreneurs are well aware that agritourism and local heritage are strongly intertwined. At the same time, many respondents highlight that an increasing number of tourists have misconceptions about what the agritourism product is. The operators report that several tourists think that the only difference between the agritourism farm and “regular” hotels and/or restaurant is just the location (i.e. the countryside). Therefore, these people expect to receive by the agritourism farm exactly the same services and products they receive from a regular hotel or restaurant (but at a lower price). Thus, according to several operators, tourists are not always able to appreciate the operators’ efforts for heritage preservation. As a consequence, several participants developed a strong sense of frustration. Actually it should be noted that this misperception may also be emphasized by the decision taken by some agritourism operators to offer only basic accommodation services or to reposition their offering toward modern concepts such as agri-spas (Sedita and Orsi, 2014), thus loosening the link with authenticity/heritage. Therefore, it is important that “authentic agritourism” operators that focus on heritage (in its three facets) are able to share the efforts to make potential guests aware about the uniqueness of their offering, emphasizing the strong link with local heritage.

The findings also underline that operators are highly satisfied with their achievement regarding heritage preservation and enhancement, while they are less satisfied with the economic benefits they received from their agritourism activities. The free comments clarify that, while in the past revenues from agritourism were remarkable, in the last decade the number of agritourism farms has increased dramatically, thus generating overcapacity. As a consequence many operators have started the price competition, and things have worsened in the last few years due to the crisis. Therefore, the significant difference in operators’ satisfaction with economic benefits vs. with their contribution to heritage preservation and enhancement may have been particularly emphasized by the current scenario.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to investigate whether local heritage (in its three facets: tangible heritage, agrifood heritage, rural way of life heritage) preservation and enhancement was a distinct motivation driving farm operators’ decision to start the agritourism activity. The findings highlight that “heritage preservation and enhancement” is a key driver of this decision and it prevails over economic motivations. The results also suggest that several operators believe that tourists have often misconceptions about the essence of agritourism. This may be the result of the frequent use of the label “agritourism” to indicate offerings which do not stress the link with local heritage.

We therefore suggest that future studies should investigate the other side of the agritourism market, i.e. tourists, and study their perceptions of the links between agritourism and heritage preservation and enhancement. Beyond focusing only on operators, this research presents other limitations. In particular, as previous studies have demonstrated, the importance of the agritourism operators’ motivations varies depending on the context. Therefore caution should be paid before extending these results to countries other than Italy (where, for example, agrifood heritage has a strong and peculiar tradition and connection with the territory). Through future refinements of this study, it will be also interesting to evaluate how the importance of the different motivations may vary depending on the profile of the operators and of their farms.

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