

Integrating Sustainability Education into Rural Tourism Development: A Conceptual Framework and Models for Agritourism and Community Growth

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[Doi:10.19044/esj.2026.v22n25p52](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2026.v22n25p52)

Submitted: 13 August 2026

Accepted: 31 August 2026

Published: 30 September 2026

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Cite As:

Sachaleli, N. (2026). *Integrating Sustainability Education into Rural Tourism Development: A Conceptual Framework and Models for Agritourism and Community Growth*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 22 (25), 52. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2026.v22n25p52>

Abstract

This study develops a conceptual framework that integrates sustainability education into rural tourism and agritourism and explores how visitor experiences might contribute to learning, community value and environmental responsibility. A structured integrative review comprised 29 core analytical sources published from 2004 to 2026, identified through Google Scholar and Crossref, verified through publisher, journal and authoritative institutional platforms, and screened against predefined relevance and eligibility criteria. The evidence was analysed through qualitative thematic synthesis and conceptual model development. The analysis identifies five interconnected requirements: authentic contact with agriculture and rural culture, intentional design of experiential learning, involvement of residents and local enterprises, balanced economic, environmental, social, cultural and educational outcomes, and enabling governance supported by skills, partnerships, and monitoring. Three flexible conceptual models are proposed: (1) a farm-based sustainability learning loop, (2) a community heritage learning network, and (3) a digitally supported rural learning route. The models translate sustainability concepts into prospective actions such as guided interpretation, food and farming demonstrations, biodiversity observation, local storytelling, visitor reflection and commitments to responsible consumption. A multidimensional indicator framework is also proposed for future assessment of learning outcomes, local

value retention, cultural continuity, resource stewardship, participation and business resilience by rural enterprises and public authorities. No fieldwork, pilot implementation, or empirical validation was conducted. Accordingly, the framework, models, anticipated benefits, and indicators are literature-derived conceptual propositions rather than evidence of demonstrated effectiveness. The study concludes that sustainability education should not be treated as an optional message added to tourism products. It may instead serve as a link between the visitor experience, local knowledge, responsible behaviour and community development. Empirical testing and participatory refinement in Georgia and comparable rural regions are required before practical effectiveness can be claimed.

Keywords: Experiential learning, stakeholder participation, visitor behaviour, sustainable livelihoods, policy design

Introduction

Rural tourism is increasingly expected to do more than attract visitors and diversify income. It is also expected to play a role in safeguarding landscapes, maintaining farming and food heritage, providing opportunities for small businesses, enhancing local identity, and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education, decent work, sustainable communities, responsible consumption, climate action and partnerships are integrated into a single development framework, the 2030 Agenda established by the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). These goals are also strongly linked in rural destinations, where living agricultural landscapes, cultural practices, local knowledge and natural resources form part of the tourism experience.

Agritourism is particularly relevant because of its ability to link tourism to agriculture. However, use of the term varies. Phillip et al. (2010) classify agritourism based on its location on a working farm, its relationship to agriculture (direct or indirect), and whether it is an authentic or staged experience. Flanigan et al. (2014) also show that the perspectives of both providers and visitors are important for understanding the agritourism experience. These differences are relevant to education because learning is more credible when it is linked to real production, local practice, and meaningful interaction with hosts. The sustainability potential of agritourism is well established but not automatic. Potential benefits noted in the literature include farm diversification, local value chains, social interaction and environmental stewardship, while recurring concerns include commercialisation of culture, unequal benefit distribution, seasonal dependence, waste and pressure on resources (An & Alarcón, 2020; Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024).

Agritourism can perform strongly across several sustainability dimensions, but the results vary depending on the design and management of the activity (Barbieri, 2013). Similarly, Sonnino (2004) showed that agritourism policy can support rural development but can also generate tensions between economic diversification and preservation of agricultural identity.

Education is a tool that can help visitors shift from passive consumption to responsible participation. Education for sustainable development is designed to develop knowledge, values, skills and agency for individual and collective change, with a focus on local action, institutional capacity and transformed learning environments (UNESCO, 2020). An educational component is already present in agritourism: observation of production processes, visits to farmers, tasting of local products, and engagement with local culture. However, learning tends to be assumed rather than planned. Van Winkle and Bueddefeld (2021) found that agritourism has the potential to facilitate free-choice learning, whereas deeper learning occurs more frequently when the experience is intentionally connected to learning goals. Opportunity and need are illustrated in the Georgian context. The fragmented institutional framework, inadequate infrastructure, lack of skills, and unequal participation of local communities can hinder the sustainability of rural tourism, which has been strongly supported as a means of regional development (Khartishvili et al., 2019). Previous research on agritourism in Georgia highlights the importance of farm diversification, employment, wine and food heritage, environmental management, and stronger development structures (Koblianidze & Sachaleli, 2021; Sachaleli, 2020, 2022). The results indicate that Georgia needs more agritourism products, as well as models that combine visitor learning, community benefits, authentic rural identity, and measurable sustainability outcomes. Accordingly, this study was organised around six analytical objectives: reviewing current practices, examining sustainability learning, developing an integration framework, assessing community-development contributions, proposing practical models, and identifying policy recommendations. These objectives are translated into analytical questions in Table 1.

Table 1: Alignment of the research objectives with the article analysis

Research objective	Analytical question	Main article output
Review current and rural-tourism practices.	Which practices already contain educational potential, and where are the main gaps?	Synthesis of authentic, experiential, digital, and community-based practices.
Understand sustainability teaching and learning.	How can tourism experiences strengthen knowledge, awareness, responsibility, and resilience?	Learning mechanisms and expected educational outcomes.

Build an integration framework.	How can education be embedded in ordinary agritourism activities?	Integrated sustainability education framework.
Study community development contributions.	How should economic, environmental, social, cultural, educational, governance and resilience dimensions be assessed?	Multidimensional indicator system.
Design practical models.	Which models can rural communities adopt at different scales and levels of capacity?	Three adaptable implementation models.
Suggest policies and strategies.	What enabling conditions are required from governments and local leaders?	Policy, governance, and monitoring recommendations.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

The article thus poses the question: How can sustainability education be made a systematic part of rural tourism and agritourism in a way that contributes to visitor learning, community development and environmental responsibility? It also raises questions about practical models and governance structures that could enable this integration to be realised on farms and in rural enterprises, communities, educational institutions and local government. The six sustainability dimensions used throughout the article are aligned with illustrative targets of the 2030 Agenda, as shown in Supplementary Table A.

Supplementary Table A: Mapping of framework dimensions to relevant Sustainable Development Goals

Dimension	Illustrative SDG linkage
Economic	SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth); SDG 1 (No Poverty)
Environmental	SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production); SDG 15 (Life on Land)
Social	SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities); SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
Cultural	SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities-cultural heritage target)
Educational	SDG 4 (Quality Education)
Governance and resilience	SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Note. Developed by the author based on United Nations (2015).

Materials and Methods

The study used a structured integrative review and conceptual model-development approach. An integrative review was selected because the research question spans empirical agritourism studies, conceptual and typological work, learning theory, and policy guidance; the purpose was qualitative synthesis rather than calculation of an aggregate effect size. Source identification was conducted in July 2026 through Google Scholar and Crossref metadata and DOI records. Full texts and bibliographic metadata were retrieved or verified through the relevant publisher and journal platforms,

including ScienceDirect (Elsevier), Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Emerald Insight, MDPI, SpringerLink, De Gruyter Brill, JSTOR, and journal-hosted repositories. Authoritative policy material was located through the UNESCO Digital Library, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals platform, and UN Tourism publications. No subscription-database export or registered systematic-review protocol was used; the review should therefore be understood as structured and integrative, not as an exhaustive systematic review of all indexed literature.

Searches used six standardised Boolean concept strings. In this context, “standardised” means that the same core concepts and search terms were retained across platforms, while operators, field syntax, and punctuation were adapted where platform requirements differed: (1) (agritourism OR agrotourism) AND (sustainab* OR "sustainable development"); (2) ("rural tourism" OR agritourism) AND ("sustainability education" OR "education for sustainable development" OR "visitor learning" OR "experiential learning"); (3) agritourism AND ("community development" OR "community participation" OR "social capital" OR governance); (4) agritourism AND (model OR framework OR typology OR indicator*); (5) ("rural tourism" OR agritourism) AND (digital* OR technology) AND (learning OR sustainability); and (6) (Georgia OR Spain OR Italy OR Romania OR Indonesia) AND (agritourism OR "rural tourism") AND sustainab*. Policy searches combined rural tourism, education, sustainability, SDGs, governance, and rural development within the relevant institutional repositories. Backward reference checking from highly relevant review, typology, and model papers was used to locate foundational and context-specific work.

Screening proceeded in four stages. First, duplicate title and DOI records were removed manually. Second, titles and abstracts were screened for direct relevance to rural tourism or agritourism. Third, full texts were assessed against the eligibility criteria. A source was included if it was a verified peer-reviewed study or an authoritative international policy document and met at least one of four substantive criteria: (1) it examined sustainability impacts or indicators; (2) it addressed learning, interpretation, or visitor behaviour in an agricultural or rural setting; (3) it developed a relevant model, typology, or governance framework; and/or (4) it provided evidence from Georgia, Spain, or a comparable rural setting. Sources were excluded when rural tourism was incidental, the full text or publication metadata could not be verified, the claims were not traceable to a credible journal or institution, the record duplicated another version, or the content did not contribute to the analytical questions in Table 1. Fourth, eligible sources were mapped to the six research objectives and retained when they contributed evidence, theory, context, indicators, or an implementation mechanism. The targeted search was

iterative and its initial platform-level hit counts and title-screening totals were not retained. These counts cannot be reconstructed reliably and are therefore not reported. This is a methodological limitation because it restricts assessment of the breadth and selectivity of the initial screening; the review does not make a PRISMA-style claim of exhaustive coverage. The final evidence base comprised 29 core analytical sources published from 2004 through 2026 and three foundational or context-setting works—Vygotsky (1978), Kolb (1984), and United Nations (2015). The 29 sources were coded deductively against the six objectives and then inductively for mechanisms, barriers, stakeholder roles, and prospective indicators. Cross-source comparison produced the integrated framework and three conceptual models. No fieldwork, stakeholder consultation, pilot implementation, or empirical validation formed part of this stage.

Supplementary Table B: Composition of the evidence base

Evidence-base component
Core analytical sources: n = 29 (2004–2026)
Foundational or context-setting works: n = 3—Kolb (1984), Vygotsky (1978), and United Nations (2015)
Total works cited: n = 32—all matched to in-text citations

Note. The three foundational or context-setting works supported learning theory and SDG framing but were not included in the 29-source thematic synthesis.

Table 2: Review protocol and analytical procedure

Element	Procedure	Rationale / transparency note
Review type	Structured integrative review with qualitative thematic synthesis and conceptual model development.	Combines empirical, conceptual, theoretical, and policy evidence; it is not an exhaustive systematic review.
Search period	Targeted and iterative searches completed in July 2026.	Captures recent work while retaining relevant foundational and context-setting literature.
Discovery platforms	Google Scholar and Crossref metadata/DOI records.	Used for cross-disciplinary discovery and bibliographic verification.
Retrieval and verification	ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Emerald Insight, MDPI, SpringerLink, De Gruyter Brill, JSTOR, journal-hosted repositories, UNESCO, UN SDG, and UN Tourism platforms.	Makes the access and verification route explicit.
Search strings	Six normalized Boolean strings reported in the methods text; syntax was adapted where platform requirements differed.	Supports reproducibility without implying identical platform syntax.

Time coverage	Core synthesis: 2004–2026; three earlier or framing works were retained separately.	Balances contemporary evidence with learning theory and SDG framing.
Screening	Manual deduplication; title/abstract relevance check; full-text eligibility assessment; objective-based evidence mapping.	Clarifies the sequence used to reach the included evidence base.
Inclusion	Verified peer-reviewed research or authoritative international policy documents meeting at least one substantive criterion.	Strengthens traceability and direct relevance.
Exclusion	Incidental rural-tourism mention, duplicate version, unverifiable metadata/full text, untraceable claims, or no contribution to the analytical questions.	Reduces unsupported or peripheral evidence.
Record limitation	Initial query-hit counts and title-screening totals were not retained and are not retrospectively estimated.	Avoids fabricating a PRISMA-style flow and defines the limit of reproducibility.
Final evidence base	29 core analytical sources plus 3 foundational/context-setting works.	Separates the thematic synthesis set from theory and SDG framing.
Analysis	Deductive coding by the six objectives, followed by inductive coding of mechanisms, barriers, stakeholder roles, and prospective indicators.	Connects the approved objectives to themes emerging across sources.
Output status	Conceptual framework, three proposed models, prospective indicators, and policy propositions.	No fieldwork, pilot testing, or empirical validation was conducted.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Supplementary Table C: Core analytical sources and contribution to the conceptual framework

Source	Study focus / context	Contribution to the framework
Adamov et al. (2020)	Romanian mountain agritourism; empirical sustainability assessment	Identified training, finance, networks, marketing, environmental resources, and cultural identity as implementation conditions and barriers.
An and Alarcón (2020)	Systematic review of sustainable rural tourism	Supported the multidimensional sustainability structure and identified recurring risks, trade-offs, and governance needs.
Armesto-López et al. (2025)	Agrotourism within rural-development transformation	Supported treatment of agrotourism as an integrated rural-development strategy rather than an isolated tourism niche.
Barbieri (2013)	United States; comparative assessment of agritourism ventures	Informed economic, environmental, and social performance indicators and the need to assess outcomes beyond revenue.
Bhatta et al. (2026)	Agritourism and the Sustainable Development Goals	Informed SDG alignment, the multidimensional indicator framework, and

		inclusion of climate and resilience considerations.
Chen et al. (2023)	Rural visitor experience and green-consumption intentions	Linked memorable experience, nature connectedness, environmental awareness, and prospective responsible behaviour.
Flanigan et al. (2014)	Provider- and visitor-based agritourism typology	Clarified authenticity, provider–visitor perspectives, and the relationship between tourism activity and agriculture.
Kazlouski et al. (2020)	Sustainable agritourism-cluster modelling	Supported network coordination, cluster-level governance, partnership diversity, and shared destination capacity.
Khartishvili et al. (2019)	Georgia; rural tourism transition and regional sustainability	Grounded the Georgian context, including fragmented governance, infrastructure, skills, and participation constraints.
Koblianidze and Sachaleli (2021)	Georgia; wine as an agricultural and agritourism product	Supported wine, food heritage, storytelling, local value creation, and authentic visitor-learning opportunities.
McGehee (2007)	Agritourism systems model	Informed the alignment of farm families, visitors, destination organisations, and other actors within a systems perspective.
Muresan et al. (2016)	Resident attitudes toward sustainable rural tourism	Supported community satisfaction, resident participation, social inclusion, and perceived-benefit indicators.
Ndhlovu and Dube (2024)	Global bibliometric analysis of agritourism sustainability	Established dominant research themes, knowledge gaps, and the risk of treating sustainability as promotional positioning.
Nieto Masot and Ríos Rodríguez (2021)	Spain; low-density rural tourism case study	Supported place-specific development strategies, territorial adaptation, and differentiated policy responses.
Paniccia and Baiocco (2021)	Co-evolution of farms and social organisations	Informed collaborative governance, community relationships, and the enabling institutional layers of the framework.
Phillip et al. (2010)	Conceptual typology defining agritourism	Established the importance of farm location, agricultural connection, and authentic versus staged experiences.
Reina-Usuga et al. (2024)	Review of rural tourism, collaborative governance, and perceived value	Supported stakeholder coordination, participatory decision-making, and governance indicators.
Riady et al. (2024)	Indonesia; village-level sustainable agrotourism model	Connected infrastructure, local economic welfare, community development, and village governance.
Sachaleli (2020)	Georgia; agritourism and regional rural development	Supported farm diversification, local enterprise development, employment, and regional value-retention considerations.
Sachaleli (2022)	Georgia; sustainability of agritourism	Informed institutionalisation, coordinated action, training, quality control, strategy, and digital-technology recommendations.
Samper-Mendivil et al. (2025)	Navarre, Spain; sustainability assessment	Highlighted uneven performance across dimensions, especially possible gaps between

		environmental and economic or cultural outcomes.
Shen et al. (2020)	Assessment model for organic agritourism potential	Informed indicators for resource attractiveness, market potential, community-development capacity, and multidimensional value.
Sonnino (2004)	Southern Tuscany; agritourism policy and identity	Highlighted tensions between economic diversification, cultural continuity, and preservation of agricultural identity.
Tedioli (2025)	Italian agritourism as a rural-development model	Provided a comparative benchmark linking farm accommodation, food production, cultural interpretation, and authenticity.
UNESCO (2020)	Education for Sustainable Development roadmap	Provided the education framework for knowledge, values, skills, agency, local action, and transformed learning environments.
Van Winkle and Bueddefeld (2021)	Free-choice learning in agritourism	Established that exposure alone is insufficient and informed intentional objectives, interpretation, reflection, and evaluation.
World Tourism Organization (2020)	International rural-tourism development guidance	Informed integrated planning, skills, infrastructure, digitalisation, finance, resource protection, and knowledge management.
World Tourism Organization (2023)	International rural-development policy perspective	Supported governance, partnership, monitoring, institutional capacity, and policy-coherence recommendations.
Yusuf and Wulandari (2023)	Conceptual model for sustainable agritourism growth	Supported model design, feasibility conditions, adaptable implementation, and sustainable-growth planning.

Note. The table lists the 29 sources included in the thematic synthesis. Kolb (1984), Vygotsky (1978), and United Nations (2015) were used only as foundational or context-setting works and were not counted among the 29 core analytical sources. Contributions indicate how each source informed the literature-derived conceptual framework; they do not represent empirical validation of the proposed models.

Reflexivity statement

The author has hands-on experience in applied and research projects related to Georgian agritourism businesses, including the wine-sector projects mentioned in this review (Koblianidze & Sachaleli, 2021; Sachaleli, 2020, 2022). This background may have influenced the choice of illustrative cases and may also have shaped the mechanisms and barriers presented during thematic synthesis. To mitigate this influence, the search strategy deliberately included non-Georgian cases (Italy, Indonesia, Spain and Romania), as well as authoritative international sources and studies that were not the author's own publications; the resultant framework was compared with these non-Georgian cases before finalisation. The discussion and policy sections should, however, be understood in the context of the author's Georgian disciplinary perspective.

Results

Agritourism as a setting for sustainability education

The synthesis suggests that education is most effective in agritourism when visitors can relate intangible sustainability concepts to what they see in rural areas. A farm, vineyard, food-processing enterprise or other community business can demonstrate seasonality, soil and water management, biodiversity, food miles, waste reduction, labour, cultural heritage and local value chains. The educational value is therefore place-based and relational: visitors learn from the landscape and from the people whose livelihoods depend on it. Authenticity is central. The typologies of Phillip et al. (2010) and Flanigan et al. (2014) demonstrate that agritourism is not simply countryside tourism because it involves contact with real agricultural production. Authenticity does not mean that every technical process must be shown, but it requires a truthful interpretation of farming realities, including environmental constraints, seasonal unpredictability, labour and economic trade-offs. Educational design should not reduce rural culture to entertainment detached from regional life. This potential is demonstrated in concrete cases across different institutional environments. In Georgia, wine-tourism businesses already integrate wine tasting, food heritage and storytelling, providing an intuitive access point to more in-depth sustainability information (Koblianidze & Sachaleli, 2021). The agrotourism model in Tapanuli Utara, Indonesia, demonstrates that infrastructure, community welfare and local governance can be integrated into village-level agrotourism development rather than treated as separate additions (Riady et al., 2024). Longer-established agritourism activities in Italy integrate farm accommodation, food production and cultural interpretation, offering a useful benchmark for authentic, farm-based learning that newer destinations can adapt to their own scale (Tedioli, 2025). The cases vary in institutional capacity and maturity, but they share the principle that educational value is realised when visitor activities are connected to real production and local knowledge rather than presented as additional messaging. Activities do more than convey information; learning is strongest when they also enable participation, dialogue and reflection. Van Winkle and Bueddefeld (2021) found support for learning in agritourism but stressed that it must be planned if visitors are to learn beyond mere exposure. Chen et al. (2023) linked rural tourism experiences with memorable experiences, connectedness to nature, environmental awareness and green-consumption intentions. These findings provide the basis for a learning sequence that includes preparation, direct involvement, interpretation, reflection, and potential action following the visit.

Table 3: Educational mechanisms in rural tourism and agritourism

Mechanism	Example activity	Expected outcome	Design condition
Observation and interpretation	Guided explanation of crops, livestock, soil, water, energy, or biodiversity.	Improved understanding of agricultural and environmental systems.	Use accurate local examples and connect them to sustainability choices.
Participation	Harvesting, planting, cooking, composting, craft-making, or simple farm tasks.	Embodied understanding of labour, seasonality, and resource use.	Ensure safety, accessibility, authenticity, and host consent.
Storytelling and dialogue	Farm-family histories, food traditions, community change, and local environmental challenges.	Respect for local knowledge, culture, and rural identity.	Allow residents to control representation of their heritage.
Demonstration and comparison	Traditional and modern production methods; local and imported supply chains.	Ability to evaluate trade-offs and responsible consumption.	Avoid idealising tradition or presenting technology as automatically sustainable.
Digital preparation	Short video, virtual visit, map, or QR-based pre-visit content.	Better orientation and accessibility before arrival.	Technology should prepare for, not replace, human interaction.
Reflection and commitment	Post-visit discussion, visitor journal, quiz, or responsible-action pledge.	Consolidation of learning and intention to change behaviour.	Prompt reflection soon after the experience and provide realistic actions.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Community growth requires multidimensional value

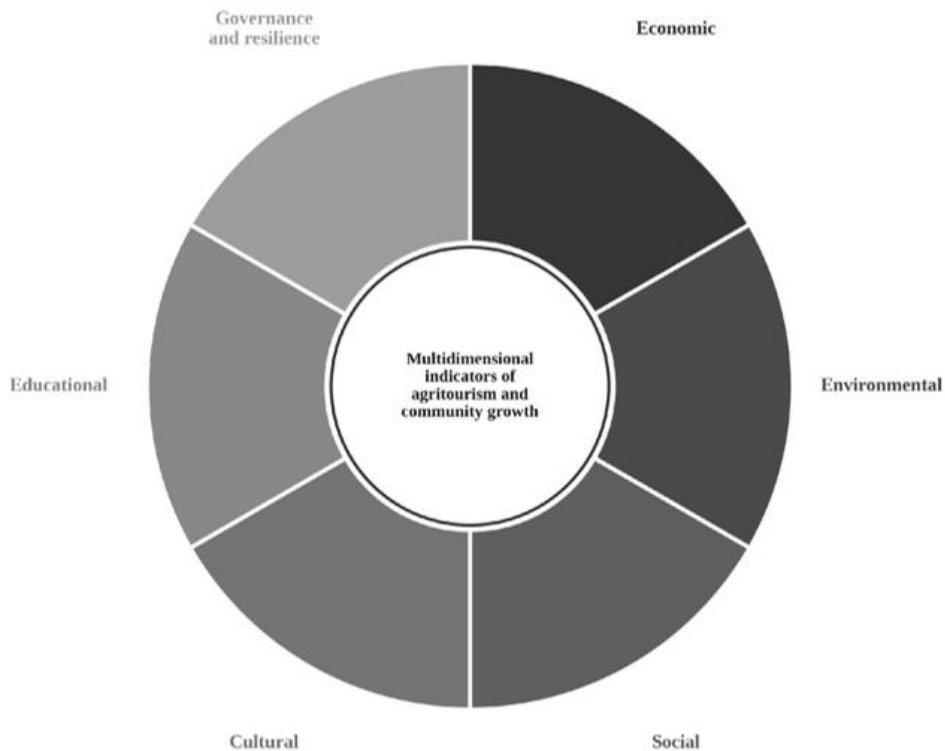
Community growth is multidimensional. Success has been defined in many ways, none of which is limited to visitor numbers or farm revenue. Sustainable rural tourism requires a balance between economic sustainability, environmental protection, social inclusion, cultural continuity and community well-being (An & Alarcón, 2020; Muresan et al., 2016). The developmental potential of organic agritourism should be evaluated based on resource attractiveness, market potential, community-development capacity, and the creation of diverse values, as suggested by Shen et al. (2020). Bhatta et al. (2026) also link agritourism to a comprehensive set of SDG targets and indicators. Additional farm income, local employment, local purchasing and stronger small-business networks are examples of economic value. Sachaleli (2020) presents agritourism as a diversification tool for rural areas in Georgia,

and Riady et al. (2024) show that infrastructure and local economic gains can support sustainable agritourism and community welfare. However, income may leak out when external intermediaries dominate, local suppliers play a limited role, or employment is seasonal and poorly paid. Environmental value refers to resource efficiency, biodiversity protection, low-impact mobility, waste prevention and support for agricultural landscapes. Adamov et al. (2020) identify insufficient training, support networks, financial resources and marketing skills as major obstacles to agritourism development; they also identify environmental and cultural resources as important elements of agritourism product identity. In established rural-tourism regions, Samper-Mendivil et al. (2025) show that environmental performance can lag behind economic and cultural gains, highlighting the importance of clearly defined environmental planning.

Because agritourism depends on active farms and agricultural landscapes, the framework also treats climate volatility as an operational risk that can affect harvest timing, increase water stress and disrupt visitor programming (Bhatta et al., 2026). Sustainability education models should therefore include seasonal and climate contingencies-such as alternative activities and flexible scheduling-in both the Prepare stage and the governance and resilience indicator dimension in Table 4. Social and cultural value comes from participation, benefit sharing and community control over representation. Paniccia and Baiocco (2021) define sustainable agritourism through the co-evolution of farms and social organisations, while Reina-Usuga et al. (2024) show that collaborative governance is important for coordinating rural-tourism stakeholders.

Cultural preservation is sustainable when traditions remain meaningful to local people and when tourism does not displace local knowledge or everyday life. The fifth cross-cutting dimension is educational value. It encompasses knowledge gained by visitors, resident capacity building, and respect for and transmission of local knowledge. Education can strengthen the value of environmental and cultural practices by making their meaning visible and can enhance the community's capacity to manage tourism. The proposed framework therefore views education not only as an additional element but also as the link between the other sustainability dimensions. The six dimensions are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Multidimensional indicator framework for agritourism and community growth.



Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Table 4: Multidimensional indicators for agritourism and community growth

Dimension	Illustrative indicators	Evidence source	Risk to monitor
Economic	Share of local purchasing; additional farm income; number and quality of local jobs; SME participation; reduced seasonality.	Barbieri (2013); Riady et al. (2024); Sachaleli (2020).	Leakage, unstable work, dependence on one market.
Environmental	Water and energy use per visitor; waste prevention; biodiversity actions; low-impact transport; conservation of productive landscapes.	Adamov et al. (2020); Shen et al. (2020); Samper-Mendivil et al. (2025).	Resource pressure, greenwashing, landscape degradation.
Social	Resident participation; inclusion of women and young people; accessibility; community satisfaction; conflict-management mechanisms.	Muresan et al. (2016); Reina-Usuga et al. (2024).	Unequal benefits, consultation fatigue, social conflict.

Cultural	Use of local stories and knowledge; continuity of food, craft, and farming traditions; community control of representation.	Koblianidze & Sachaleli (2021); Sonnino (2004).	Commodification, stereotyping, loss of authenticity.
Educational	Learning objectives; pre/post knowledge or reflection; visitor engagement; host capacity; responsible-behaviour intentions.	Chen et al. (2023); UNESCO (2020); Van Winkle & Bueddefeld (2021).	Information overload, superficial messaging, unmeasured outcomes.
Governance and resilience	Partnership diversity; local decision rights; risk plans; access to training and finance; monitoring and public reporting.	Kazlouski et al. (2020); World Tourism Organization (2023).	Fragmentation, weak accountability, project dependence.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

The integrated Sustainability Education for Agritourism and Rural Tourism framework

The collected evidence was synthesised into the proposed Sustainability Education for Agritourism and Rural Tourism conceptual framework. It comprises five prospective stages of visitor-facing activities—Prepare, Experience, Interpret, Co-create, and Reflect and Act—with a continuous Review and Improve feedback loop. The proposed cycle is designed to be repeated across visitor groups and changing business circumstances because learning, community feedback and business improvement should be ongoing. The five-stage cycle is based on experiential learning theory, in which learning involves concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

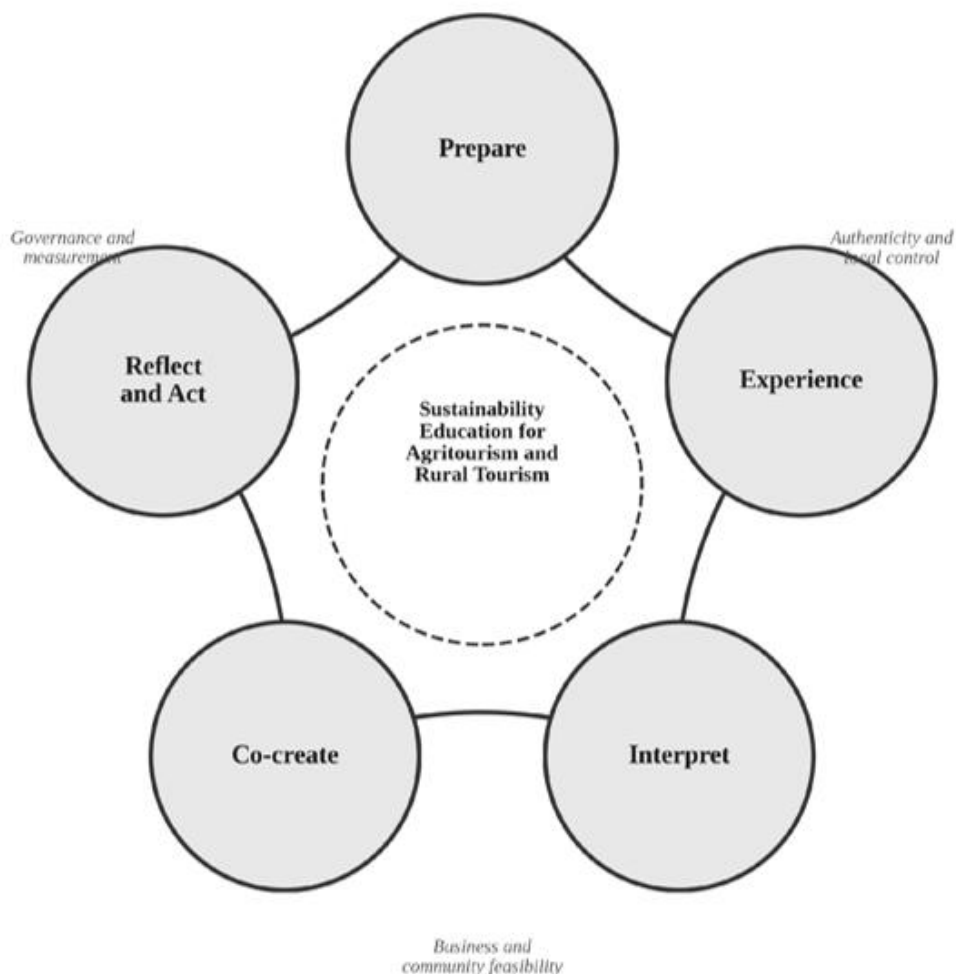
It is also consistent with constructivist and social-learning perspectives, which hold that knowledge is not simply fixed information but is constructed through meaningful interactions with people and place (Vygotsky, 1978). It is important to make clear that Experience alone is unlikely to produce lasting learning without structured Interpret, Co-create, and Reflect and Act phases. Prepare includes setting learning goals, identifying the host community's learning priorities, assessing safety and accessibility, and communicating what visitors can expect. Digital tools can enhance orientation; they should not create uncertainty or exclusion but should support inclusion. Experience provides first-hand contact with agriculture, food, landscape and rural life. Interpret connects the experience with its environmental, economic, social and cultural significance.

Co-create provides a framework for dialogue between visitors and residents to address a local issue, resolve a problem or participate in a local

activity. Reflect and Act provides an opportunity for participants to review and integrate their learning and determine a realistic post-visit action.

It also allows hosts to gather feedback for improvement. This learning cycle rests on three enabling layers. The first concerns authenticity and local control: the farm and community determine what is shared and how it is represented. The second is business and community feasibility: activities need to be compatible with working hours, labour, safety, seasonality and finances. The third is governance and measurement: partnerships, training, indicators and feedback mechanisms should help maintain continuity beyond a single project or event. Figure 2 displays the five-stage cycle and its enabling layers.

Figure 2: The Sustainability Education for Agritourism and Rural Tourism framework.



Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Table 5: Integrated framework: stages, feedback loop, actions, and evidence of achievement

Stage	Core action	Examples	Evidence of achievement
Prepare	Set learning and community objectives before the visit.	Briefing, digital orientation, accessibility information, host planning.	Objectives documented; roles and risks agreed; visitors understand expectations.
Experience	Provide authentic and safe contact with rural production and culture.	Farm walk, vineyard visit, food demonstration, biodiversity observation.	Active participation; meaningful host contact; safe and inclusive delivery.
Interpret	Explain why practices matter for sustainability and livelihoods.	Storytelling, comparison of production methods, resource-use explanation.	Visitors can describe connections among farming, culture, environment, and economy.
Co-create	Enable dialogue or a small collaborative activity.	Visitor questions, idea workshop, citizen observation, local product design discussion.	Residents and visitors exchange knowledge; local priorities remain central.
Reflect and act	Consolidate learning and identify realistic follow-up actions.	Reflection card, post-visit quiz, local-purchase commitment, feedback survey.	Learning recorded; responsible intentions identified; host receives improvement data.
Review and improve (feedback loop)	Use evidence to adjust the experience and report community value.	Seasonal review, indicator dashboard, stakeholder meeting.	Activities revised; impacts monitored; community concerns addressed.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Three practical models for different rural contexts

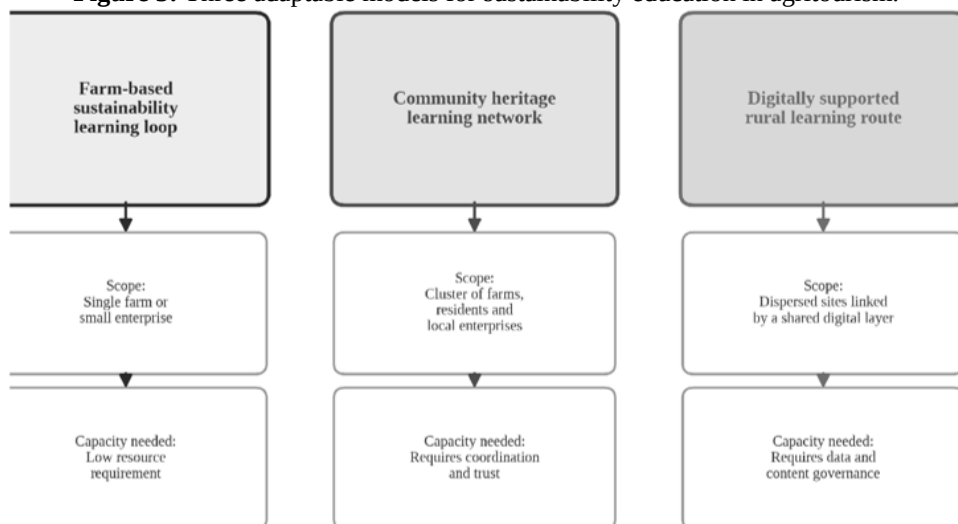
There is no one-size-fits-all solution for rural destinations. The literature on agritourism systems, clusters and rural development indicates that scale, institutional capacity, market access, community cohesion and infrastructure significantly influence what can be implemented (Kazlouski et al., 2020; McGehee, 2007; Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023). The conceptual framework is therefore expressed through three flexible, literature-derived models proposed for future testing. The Farm Sustainability Learning Loop could be used by a single farm, winery, guesthouse or food producer. It requires little coordination and can start with one well-designed activity.

The proposed Community Heritage Learning Network would connect several community actors and is suitable for villages with complementary

resources such as farms, crafts, gastronomy, landscapes and cultural sites. The proposed Digitally Supported Rural Learning Route would connect a series of locations through shared interpretation and a common digital layer. It is suitable for dispersed or less-visited locations, but it requires more coordination, connectivity and content governance.

Because the Digitally Supported Rural Learning Route gathers visitor data, including bookings, feedback and learning measures, and repackages resident storytelling as shared content, governance arrangements should specify informed consent for data collection, ownership of community stories and images, residents' rights to withdraw or modify content, and documented privacy protections appropriate to the jurisdiction. Figure 3 compares the models in terms of scale and capacity.

Figure 3: Three adaptable models for sustainability education in agritourism.



Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Conceptual investment profile (illustrative and subject to empirical testing)

For planning purposes, the framework places the Farm Sustainability Learning Loop in the low-investment category because it uses existing farm infrastructure, one trained host and low-cost printed or digital materials. The Community Heritage Learning Network is a medium-investment model because it requires a paid or supported local coordinator, shared marketing materials and a benefit-sharing agreement. The framework ranks the Digitally Supported Rural Learning Route as the highest-investment option because it requires connectivity, content production, data management and maintenance; in low-connectivity Georgian areas, it may also require public or donor co-financing rather than enterprise funding alone. Figure 4 provides a consolidated comparison.

Figure 4: Comparison of the three practical models across scope, components, benefits, and requirements.

MODEL 1 Farm Sustainability Learning Loop	
BEST SUITED TO Single farm, winery, guesthouse, or producer.	CORE COMPONENTS Prepare–experience–interpret–reflect cycle; one or two sustainability themes; visitor feedback.
ANTICIPATED BENEFITS Low-cost entry; strong authenticity; direct host–visitor learning.	MAIN REQUIREMENTS Host training; safety plan; simple educational materials; manageable group size.
MODEL 2 Community Heritage Learning Network	
BEST SUITED TO Village or local cluster with several enterprises and community assets.	CORE COMPONENTS Shared themes; coordinated route; resident storytellers; local purchasing; joint calendar.
ANTICIPATED BENEFITS Distributes benefits; strengthens identity; links businesses and community knowledge.	MAIN REQUIREMENTS Local coordinator; participation rules; benefit-sharing; quality standards; conflict management.
MODEL 3 Digitally Supported Rural Learning Route	
BEST SUITED TO Dispersed sites or destinations seeking multilingual and accessible interpretation.	CORE COMPONENTS Digital map; QR content; short videos; booking links; data collection; post-visit learning.
ANTICIPATED BENEFITS Improves access and continuity; comparison across sites; measurement.	MAIN REQUIREMENTS Connectivity; content ownership; privacy protection; digital skills; maintenance budget.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Table 6: Practical models for sustainability education in agritourism

Model	Best suited to	Core components	Anticipated benefits (to be tested)	Main requirements
Farm Sustainability Learning Loop	Single farm, winery, guesthouse, or producer.	Prepare-experience-interpret-reflect cycle; one or two sustainability themes; visitor feedback.	Low-cost entry; strong authenticity; direct host-visitor learning.	Host training, safety plan, simple educational materials, manageable group size.
Community Heritage Learning Network	Village or local cluster with several enterprises and community assets.	Shared themes; coordinated route; resident storytellers; local purchasing; joint calendar.	Distributes benefits; strengthens identity; links businesses and community knowledge.	Local coordinator, participation rules, benefit-sharing, quality standards, conflict management.
Digitally Supported Rural Learning Route	Dispersed sites or destinations seeking multilingual and accessible interpretation.	Digital map, QR content, short videos, booking links, data collection, post-visit learning.	Improves access, continuity, comparison across sites, and measurement.	Connectivity, content ownership, privacy protection, digital skills, maintenance budget.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Policy and governance requirements

These models require more than promotional campaigns; they need to be enabled by policy and institutional support. The World Tourism Organization (2020) recommends integrated planning, multi-stakeholder involvement, skills, infrastructure, digitalisation, finance, resource protection and knowledge management. The World Tourism Organization (2023) also identifies these enabling conditions as important to tourism development in rural areas. Policy therefore needs to enable product development, as well as the capacity to manage learning, participation and impact. Policy coherence is especially important for Georgia. Both Khartishvili et al. (2019) and Sachaleli (2022) identify a need for institutionalisation and coordinated action, as well as frameworks, quality control, sustainable-development strategies, training and digital technologies.

As shown in the Spanish literature, rural-tourism outcomes vary across territories, and place-specific indicators and interventions are necessary (Nieto Masot & Ríos Rodríguez, 2021; Samper-Mendivil et al., 2025). Policy transfer should be flexible and informed by international practice but adapted to local

governance capacity, agricultural structures, cultural identity and community priorities. Public authorities should avoid counting only the number of businesses trained, digital tools built or visitors attracted as measures of success. Monitoring should ask: Do local businesses retain value, do local residents have a voice in decision-making, are cultural and environmental resources preserved, and are visitors learning? Armesto-López et al. (2025) argue that agrotourism should not be treated as a tourism niche but should be viewed as part of rural-development transformation. This supports an integrated policy linking agriculture, tourism, education, environment, culture and local economic development.

Table 7: Policy actions, responsible actors, and monitoring indicators

Policy action	Lead and supporting actors	Short-term output	Outcome indicator
Create agritourism sustainability-education guidelines.	Tourism and agriculture authorities; universities; operator associations.	Practical guide, activity templates, and minimum quality principles.	Share of participating enterprises using documented learning objectives and sustainability practices.
Provide modular training and mentoring.	Universities, vocational providers, municipalities, experienced operators.	Training on interpretation, safety, digital tools, inclusion, and impact measurement.	Completion and application rates; operator confidence; quality improvements.
Support pilot destinations and small grants.	National agencies, municipalities, donors, rural-development organisations.	Pilots for farms, village networks, and digital routes.	Local business participation, learning outcomes, community satisfaction, environmental actions.
Build local governance mechanisms.	Municipalities, community groups, business associations, residents.	Stakeholder forum, participation rules, benefit-sharing and grievance process.	Diversity of participation; decisions influenced by residents; conflicts addressed.
Develop a simple indicator dashboard.	Destination organisations, universities, local authorities.	Annual reporting on economic, environmental, social, cultural, and educational value.	Availability and use of data in planning; improvement against baseline.
Improve finance, connectivity, and market access.	Government, banks, digital providers, business-support organisations.	Small investment instruments, digital access, and buyer connections.	Investment uptake, local sales, direct bookings, reduced geographic exclusion.

Note. Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature.

Discussion

This study repositions sustainability education as the connecting link between tourism experiences and community development. The current literature typically treats education as a visitor benefit, sustainability as an impact-management challenge, and community participation as a governance challenge. The proposed framework integrates these domains. A visitor learns not just because information is available, but also because the experience is authentic, interpreted, participatory and connected to local choices. A community benefits not only because tourists spend money; local knowledge, decision-making, environmental stewardship and enterprise capacity also become part of the tourism model. This holistic perspective extends the systems perspective of agritourism. McGehee (2007) highlighted the importance of aligning the motivations and relationships of farm families, destination organisations and visitors.

The current framework introduces an explicit educational process, as well as a wider community-development measurement layer. It also reinforces the co-evolutionary view of Paniccia and Baiocco (2021): farms are not sustainable by themselves but through their relationships with community organisations, public institutions, markets and knowledge networks. In addition, the study explains why digital innovation needs to be viewed as an enabler rather than the core of the experience. Access and continuity can be enhanced through digital maps, short videos, virtual preparation, multilingual interpretation and feedback tools. At the same time, digital tools can standardise narratives, shift control away from communities and promote superficial interactions. The proposed models thus position digital tools as additional support while preserving direct host-visitor interaction and place-based authenticity. This highlights the danger of education being used as marketing. One recurring tension in the literature is that sustainability education can be seen as a transformative process in its own right or as a branding layer added to existing tourism products (An & Alarcón, 2020; Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). This same danger exists if the framework is implemented superficially: a farm could claim to provide “interpretation” and “reflection” while delivering only scripted talking points. To prevent this, the indicators listed in Table 4 - especially host capacity, visitor engagement, and documented learning objectives, should be used as accountability measures rather than marketing checklists, and destination organisations should audit claims rather than merely count participating enterprises.

The practical models are conceptual propositions designed for different levels of capacity. Subject to pilot testing, the farm-level model may be feasible by small farms with limited resources, making it a suitable starting point for small Georgian businesses. For the community network to build stronger local value chains and diversify participation, coordination and trust

are important. The digital route could link dispersed sites and facilitate measurement, but it requires governance of data, content and maintenance. Model selection should therefore be based on capacity rather than technology or promotion. The framework must also accommodate visitors whose primary goal is not learning. Not all agritourism guests are interested in structured educational programmes, and imposing them on leisure-oriented guests may reduce visitor satisfaction.

Illustrative non-empirical application scenario: the Farm Sustainability Learning Loop in Kakheti

The following literature-informed scenario is included only to illustrate how the proposed model might be operationalised in a Georgian setting. It is not an empirical case study, completed pilot, field observation, or evidence of effectiveness. A small family-owned vineyard in Kakheti could apply the Farm Sustainability Learning Loop around one theme: Water Stewardship. Visitors could receive a two-minute orientation video before the visit explaining the farm's irrigation methods and suggesting questions (Prepare). During the prospective Experience stage, a host could guide visitors through the vines and explain visible features such as drip irrigation, soil-moisture markers, and the harvest schedule. The host could then discuss why these decisions matter for yield stability, long-term land health, household income, and generational continuity (Interpret). Visitors might help sort a small batch of grapes and discuss trade-offs between organic and conventional farming (Co-create). Before departure, they could complete a two-question reflection card identifying one learning point and one intended action; the host could review the cards periodically to refine the activity (Reflect and Act). If implemented and evaluated, the accumulated cards could provide one form of evidence for the prospective achievement indicators in Table 5.

The Prepare stage should therefore offer layered participation, providing a baseline experience for all visitors while making deeper engagement—guided interpretation, co-creation activities and reflection tools—available to those who choose it. This reflects free-choice learning principles already identified in agritourism settings (Van Winkle & Bueddefeld, 2021) and avoids forcing all visitor interactions into a classroom setting. The framework addresses the six analytical objectives established for this study by synthesising current practices, identifying mechanisms for sustainability learning, developing an integration framework, examining multidimensional community outcomes, proposing adaptable implementation models, and identifying enabling policy actions. Future empirical research can extend this conceptual foundation through field-based testing without changing its central analytical structure. For empirical validation, the next step should involve selecting several agritourism cases across Georgia and testing

at least one model. A mixed-method design may combine interviews with operators and stakeholders, structured observation, and short pre- and post-experience visitor measures.

Learning, feasibility, authenticity, community involvement, local value and environmental relevance should all be evaluated. Through this design, future empirical work could directly address the gap identified by Van Winkle and Bueddefeld (2021), who showed that learning occurs in agritourism but requires more deliberate design and assessment. This study has several limitations. It is a structured, targeted integrative review rather than a systematic review of all indexed literature, and the initial search-hit and title-screening counts were not retained. More importantly, no fieldwork, stakeholder consultation, pilot implementation, controlled observation, or longitudinal evaluation was conducted. The framework, three models, investment profiles, anticipated benefits, and indicators are therefore conceptual propositions derived from literature synthesis and should not be interpreted as evidence of proven effectiveness. Contextual differences also limit transfer: a model suitable for a well-connected Spanish rural destination may not be feasible in a Georgian mountain village without adaptation. Educational outcomes can also be difficult to distinguish from entertainment, novelty, prior knowledge and destination satisfaction. Empirical testing in Georgia should therefore include participatory refinement with rural operators and residents, feasibility assessment, pre- and post-experience visitor measures, and monitoring of economic, environmental, social, cultural, educational, governance, and resilience indicators.

Conclusions

Rural tourism and agritourism may support sustainable development when tourism experiences are intentionally designed as spaces for learning, participation and locally retained value. This review provides a conceptual framework built around preparation, experience, interpretation, co-creation, reflection and action, and continuous improvement, together with three adaptable models for individual enterprises, community networks, and digitally connected rural routes. The proposed indicators offer a practical basis for future assessment of economic, environmental, social, cultural, educational, governance, and resilience outcomes, but they do not constitute evidence of effectiveness. The immediate practical implication is that rural tourism actors can use the framework to structure pilot activities, learning objectives, stakeholder roles and monitoring before wider implementation. The next research step is empirical testing in Georgia with rural operators, residents, visitors, educators, and local authorities, including assessment of feasibility, visitor learning, community acceptance, resource demands, unintended effects, and measurable sustainability outcomes before the

framework is converted into a practical toolkit or used for evidence-based policy.

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges Grigol Robakidze University for financially supporting the research visit to the University of La Laguna and the European Scientific Institute for supporting the publication of this article. The academic discussions and research exchange associated with the postdoctoral programme and the University of La Laguna visit contributed to the scholarly environment in which the article was developed but did not constitute empirical data collection or independent validation of the framework. No individual is acknowledged as a contributor to the analysis beyond the author.

Conflict of Interest: The author reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: No new empirical dataset was generated. The article is based on publicly available published sources listed in the References section. Supplementary Table C identifies all 29 sources used in the thematic synthesis and records their contribution to the conceptual framework. The original platform-level search-result counts were not retained; consequently, no retrospective numerical screening flow is claimed. No AI tool was used to generate research data or conduct empirical analysis.

Funding Statement: Grigol Robakidze University financially supported the author's research visit to the University of La Laguna. The European Scientific Institute is supporting the publication of this article. These forms of support did not influence source-selection decisions, coding, interpretation, framework development, or the conclusions of the article.

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