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**INTERNSHIP REPORT IN *AGRITURISMO BEATILLA* –
ASSISTANT HOTEL MANAGER**



UNIVERSIDADE DO ALGARVE

FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA

2022

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**INTERNSHIP REPORT IN *AGRITURISMO BEATILLA* – ASSISTANT
HOTEL MANAGER**

Masters in Tourism Organizations Management (TOM)

Internship Report made under the supervision of: Iris Lopes



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Internship Report in *Agriturismo Beatilla* – Assistant Hotel Manager

Statement of authorship of the work

I declare to be the author of this work, which is unique and unprecedented. Authors and works consulted are properly cited in the text and are included in the listing of references.

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ABSTRACT

The overall tourism industry was extremely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with a reduction of 20% to 30% in the international arrivals and a tremendous income loss of in 2020. Consequently, the agritourism sector suffered with it and some initiatives and strategies were implemented to recover the loss and then, survive in the market.

Furthermore, a 640-hours curricular internship was also taken in a small-medium agritourism accommodation, between October and February of 2021/2022, named as *Agriturismo Beatilla*.

As a result, the present report describes not only the agritourism sector and the impact of COVID-19 on it, as it specifies the activities undertaken within the internship in several departments.

It was used the mixed methodological method and for this reason and without counting with the introduction and conclusion, the report is split into 4 parts: (i) the literature review, where the agritourism concept is discussed along with its essence, typology and it restricts to the Italian agritourism, its resilience due to the COVID-19 strike and the “new tourist” of the post pandemic; and the three main agritourism cornerstones (ii) the internship, which is the chapter that describes all the tasks performed and the respective critical analysis; (iii) results – *Agriturismo Beatilla* and COVID-19, being presented the results of the 35 informal interviews made to the *Beatilla's* guests; (iv) and finally, the future of *Agriturismo Beatilla*, with some initiatives that may be applied in the sector to promote its progress and success.

The results of the report showed that the pandemic affected the agritourism sector with less demand and greater loss. However, the domestic tourism increased, mitigated the loss felt and it appeared new needs and motivations, in special the “new tourist”. In addition, the new initiatives applied showed how the agritourism may be resilient to difficult situations.

Keywords: agritourism; COVID-19; Italy; resilience; *Agriturismo Beatilla*

SUMÁRIO

No contexto de COVID-19, o setor do turismo foi extremamente abalado e forçou ao encerramento de vários destinos turísticos, que testemunharam a redução da procura turística devido às medidas e restrições implementadas de modo a prevenir o avanço da pandemia. Com isto, houve uma drástica redução das chegadas internacionais e do rendimento no período de 2019 a 2020 a nível mundial.

Inevitavelmente que o agroturismo, segmento turístico em forte crescimento antes da pandemia, foi negativamente impactado pelo mesmo, em especial na Itália por possuir inúmeras zonas rurais com facilidades e serviços agroturísticos. Deste modo e com o intuito de adquirir uma maior perceção do segmento com a influência do COVID-19 e do funcionamento de um pequeno-médio negócio agroturístico, foi realizado um estágio curricular de 640 horas no *Agriturismo Beatilla* entre outubro e fevereiro de 2021/2022, a executar diversas tarefas pelos vários departamentos existentes. Ainda assim, 35 entrevistas informais foram realizadas baseadas em outros estudos e no próprio proprietário Luca Bornoffi de modo a obter o ponto de vista sobre o assunto em estudo pelos hóspedes da instituição de acolhimento do estágio.

Assim, o presente relatório de estágio não só descreve o setor do agroturismo, como também especifica as atividades desenvolvidas no âmbito do estágio já mencionado, fazendo uso do método misto como o principal no campo do método metodológico. Por isso, o relatório encontra-se dividido em quatro partes:

(i) a revisão da literatura: explica a essência do agroturismo, sua tipologia e, em seguida, restringe-se ao agroturismo italiano e sua resiliência em função ao surgimento da pandemia mundial denominada por COVID-19. Posteriormente, é abordado o “new tourist” do pós-pandemia e os três principais pilares (inovação, sustentabilidade e digitalismo) cruciais para o sucesso contínuo e próspero do agroturismo.

(ii) o estágio: menciona todas as tarefas executadas em todos os departamentos do *Agriturismo Beatilla* e ainda, a respetiva consideração ou crítica pessoal em relação a cada departamento.

(iii) resultados – *Agriturismo Beatilla* e COVID-19: são apresentadas neste capítulo os resultados das 35 entrevistas informais feitas aos hóspedes da instituição selecionada para

o estágio em forma de gráficos e tabelas para uma melhor compreensão do assunto em termos de ficar a conhecer melhor o agroturismo e seus os hóspedes.

(iv) futuro do agroturismo: é delineado como o resultado de tudo o que foi abordado anteriormente e ainda, é feito destaque aos cinco elementos que devem ser aplicados para fazer face às dificuldades provocadas pela pandemia e ainda, prosperar no negócio.

No geral, o estágio permitiu verificar o impacto do COVID-19 num negócio italiano que se dedica ao agroturismo e a partir do mesmo e das entrevistas realizadas, conclui-se que a pandemia provocou um decréscimo das chegadas, uma mudança das motivações dos hóspedes e uma nova procura. Em primeiro lugar, o turismo doméstico superou o turismo internacional, representando a maioria do mercado agroturístico. Isto significa que, para além dos clientes habituais, houve cada vez mais chegadas de clientes que procuravam escapar do movimento da cidade e relaxar em zonas rurais isoladas e mais seguras. Ainda assim, a Alemanha foi o país de proveniência da maior parte dos hóspedes internacionais do alojamento em 2020 e 2021. Em segundo lugar, pandemia desencadeou uma nova procura turística, uma mais insegura e cautelosa para viajar e outra denominada de “new tourist”, sendo que este último segmento é mais exigente, atento ao detalhe e tem preferência para os alojamentos sustentáveis e *eco-friendly*. Por último, houve uma mudança de motivações por preferirem o isolamento, segurança (31%) e paz, calma e momentos relaxantes (26%) em comparação com as atividades da natureza (9%) e ao estilo de vida saudável (6%). Relativamente ao *Agriturismo Beatilla*, as *reviews* positivas, a localização e as atividades são os principais elementos que motivam os indivíduos a escolherem este específico no vasto leque de opções.

Para além disto, o estudo revelou que o futuro do sector agroturístico reside na:

- 1) Diversificação dos serviços,
- 2) Produção e comida típica,
- 3) Entrega ao domicílio e *e-commerce*,
- 4) *Smart-working* e longas estadias e,
- 5) Turismo sustentável.

E ainda destacou a grande resiliência do setor que, através da aplicação de novas iniciativas e estratégias, foi capaz de superar as consequências negativas da pandemia. Ou seja, revelou ser inovador e adaptável a qualquer circunstância. No entanto, é também

necessário referir que os indivíduos e/ou hóspedes foram suscetíveis à mudança e às novas iniciativas de modo a auxiliar um sector que estava fragilizado.

Para terminar, o estágio e o próprio relatório contribuíram para o enriquecimento pessoal, proporcionaram a oportunidade de aprender e adquirir novos conhecimentos e habilidades junto de profissionais experientes na área do agroturismo e ainda, aplicar todo o conhecimento adquirido no mestrado em situações da vida real.

Palavras-passe: agroturismo; COVID-19; Itália; resiliência; *Agriturismo Beatilla*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TOM Tourism Organizations Management

UNWTO World Tourism Organization

NFW Non-working farm agritourism

WFPC Working farm, passive contact agritourism

WWOOF Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms

ISMEA Italian Institute of Services for the Agricultural Food Market

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

IT information technology

HR human resources

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizatio

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Taking in consideration the regulation of the Tourism Organizations Management (TOM) Master of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Algarve, the present report constitutes the final requirement needed for obtaining the master's degree. Hence, it was elaborated to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the agritourism industry, especially in the chosen country and accommodation, and to describe all the performed tasks in detail.

The curricular internship was executed in the *Agriturismo Beatilla*, in which it was performed several tasks in multiple departments as an Assistant Hotel Manager from October 1st until February 28th, in a total of 640 hours.

1.1. Theme and its Relevance

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted severely the tourism industry, especially in the agritourism sector. There was a significant decrease of demand and income essential for the continuous development and improvement of the sector in study.

For this reason, it was conducted an internship abroad in an Italian agritourism accommodation in order to have a better insight and understanding of the business and, to get to know the real impacts of the pandemic in one of the worldwide top agritourism destinations. Moreover, some strategies and initiatives will be mentioned as an answer to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, taking the *Agriturismo Beatilla* as a study case.

Regarding the theme and report relevance, the study provides knowledge about a sector that does not have too many studies, particularly about Italy and the influence of COVID-19 pandemic. It also shows the perspective of the guests about the theme, which is significant due to the change of the travel patterns and important to understand their current needs and desires. Lastly, it outlines initiatives that may be used by some business that were and still are being affected by the pandemic.

1.2. Goals

The overall goal of this internship is to apply the acquired knowledge in TOM's master. As a result, it also aims to present:

- The essence of agritourism,
- The agritourism in Italy and its evolution with the COVID-19 pandemic,
- The strategies or initiatives applied to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic,
- The 3 pillars that contribute to the continuous success and development of this type of tourism,
- *Agriturismo Beatilla* as a study case (its history, services, organizational structure, internal and external analysis),
- All the tasks performed during the internship period,
- The results of the informal interviews.

Besides the objectives already presented, which are related to the main theme, there are others that influences the development of the intern's personal and professional skills, such as:

- Timeliness, organization, responsibility skills development,
- Enhance of the technical, communication, teamwork, and customer service skills,
- Management of a small/medium company,
- Overall knowledge of all hospitality departments,
- Improvement of Italian and English,
- Contribute to the companies digital marketing efficiency.

1.3. Methodology

To achieve the objectives already mentioned in the subchapter 1.2., the present report was carried out through four phases.

At first, there was conducted a literature review about the concepts related to agritourism (rural tourism, working farm, authenticity), its typology and the Italian agritourism with a great focus on the COVID-19 impacts. There was also the search for the three cornerstones that enables the continuous development and improvement of agritourism,

which were enriched with some examples applied essentially to overcome the negative side of the pandemic. Secondly, the internship itself and the personal observation allowed the detailed description of the tasks performed and consequently, critical analysis about each department. At third, it was collected information through the informal interviews made to the guests to get their point of view about the subject and finally, it is suggested some initiatives, which are seen as the new future of the sector.

In general, the method research used was the mixed. In one hand, there was the observation and personal participation in distinctive departments to understand each employee role, realize the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and recommend new strategies and initiatives with the intention of improving the efficiency and profitability of the company. This means that the *Agriturismo Beatilla* was used as case study research in order to observe, analyze and explain what was mentioned below to then, take a conclusion. On the other hand, 35 informal interviews were performed to guests of different nationalities with the intention of observe, quantify, analyze, conclude, and write about the subject in study. The statistical analysis made found the facts & causes about the goals also described in the qualitative method and the questions (Appendix 1) made were related to the guests' motivations, the agritourism accommodation itself and the influence of the pandemic. These interviews were carried out from November 1st and February 28th during the check-in time (3pm until 8pm) for about 10 minutes each and they were made based on the following studies, (1) Chin, W and Musa, S. (2021) “Agritourism resilience against Covid-19: Impacts and management strategies”; (2) Finizia, A., Fratto, F., Galasso, A., Hausmann, C., Nucera, M. and Selmi, U. (2021) *Agriturismo e multifunzionalità: scenario e prospettive. Ministero delle politiche Agricole alimentari e forestali*. Additionally, it was considered some questions advised by the owner Luca Bornoffi. In order to maintain the anonymity, the name of each individual interviewed was not noted.

With regards to the internship, the tasks were carried out over 640 hours in two different shifts, (i) the morning between 07:30am until 1:30pm and, (ii) the afternoon between 1:30pm and 8pm. The table 1.1. presents the organization of the internship.

Table 1.1. Internship tasks organization and length

Internship Length	General Tasks*	Expected results	Research Tasks
Month 1	Front and back-office.	Understand the function of each department to have an internal insight of the company way of working	Problem description
	Check-in and check-out.		
	Reservations and cancellations.		
Month 2	Answering calls and emails.		Finding literature
	Show the rooms to the guests.		
	Assistance in preparing the breakfast.		
Month 3	Communicate the need to prepare and clean rooms with the housekeeper.	Reach the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and examine guests' motivations	Data collection and analysis
	Post of appealing contents in social media		
	Informal interviews to the guests		
Month 4 & 5	Study and implementation of innovative strategies.	Improve the company profitability	Writing the report
General Tasks*: The tasks described are common for all months (month 1-5)			

Source: self-elaboration (2021)

1.4. Report structure

The report is divided into 6 chapters. The first chapter introduces the theme and the framing of the research work carried out during the internship. In other words, the theme is presented along with its relevance, goals, and work structure.

The second chapter addresses the literature review about the overall essence of agritourism and its typology, followed by the agritourism in Italy, the influence that the COVID-19 had on it and the three main elements (innovation, sustainability, and digitalism) that makes the continuous success of the sector in study.

The third chapter includes the description of the accommodation where the internship took place, *Agriturismo Beatilla*, in line with its characterization, services, organizational structure and SWOT analysis. Additionally, there is also the job description and the critical analysis for each department.

The fourth chapter focus on the results of the informal interviews in order to understand what attracts the guests to an agritourism accommodation, present the facts about the real impacts of COVID-19 in the study case of the accommodation *Beatilla* and realize the guests' suggestions to improve it. Then, the fifth chapter introduces the future of the agritourism sector with 5 key elements that COVID-19 brought and will be essential to be in the market.

At last, the sixth chapter refers to the conclusion related to the internship made and suggestions.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The essence of agritourism

In accordance to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Rural Tourism is defined as “a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, angling and sightseeing [and those activities happen] in non-urban areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle" (UNWTO, 2022). In other words, this type of tourism should be in a rural space where its primary function is mainly agricultural, and the existing buildings and resources are used for accommodation and new forms of recreation (e.g., fruit picking, art workshops, hiking, ride a horse and among many others) (Roman & Grudzień, 2021).

The Rural Tourism has been increasing across the years due to two main factors, the isolation provided and the opportunity to experience a healthy lifestyle (Westcott & Wang, 2021). Especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rural areas showed to be “low risk [...] and spaces for physical distancing or “closed” tourism sites” (Chin & Musa, 2021, p.3). Hence, these types of areas are seen “as a place for passive

rest and also for active leisure” (Roman & Grudzień, 2021, p.4), where the individuals may live unique and memorable experiences much different from the big cities. For instance, the founder and general manager of Shanghai Tour Guide Enterprise Management Consulting (2021) said, “there is a need to experience a different kind of life, like idyllic scenery or countryside life, to change a lifestyle on the weekend” (Mingqi, 2021 cited in Westcott & Wang, 2021) and the pandemic boosted those needs, taking in account the prediction of “more than four billion trips made across China in 2021, [...] worth just over \$500 billion” (Westcott & Wang, 2021).

Additionally, Rural Tourism can be divided according to the activities, tourist needs, and activities offered. Firstly, the study carried out by Litheko & Potgieter (2019) highlights a range of different activities included in this type of tourism, which are: agritourism, ecotourism, wine tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and heritage tourism. Secondly, the rural tourism may be split into four types in regards to the tourist needs or demands, such as: agritourism, which is “based on an operating active farm and attractions related to agriculture” (Roman & Grudzień, 2021, p.5); ecotourism that is offered to individuals who desire to be outdoors, especially in forest, out of the urban areas; ethnotourism, which is mainly focus on trips related with the contact of different cultures (e.g. trips to learn or promote certain culture) and memories (e.g. visit of places from their childhood); and finally, therapee tourism, type of rural tourism addressed to individuals interested in a natural environment healing or treatment of the human body (e.g. rural spa). Thirdly, there is also a typology of Rural Tourism according to the following activity offered: (i) an agritourism farm on a functioning farm; (ii) a rural accommodation facility; (iii) and the facility in a rural area (Roman & Grudzień, 2021).

One of the types and sub-sectors of Rural Tourism is agritourism and, for this reason, it was important to provide a better understanding of Rural Tourism for then, realize the real meaning of Agritourism due to the many standards that are featured between both concepts. In that case, the Agritourism definition “is wider in scope than accommodation provision” (Clarke, 1999, p. 27) since it integrates the hosting house into the agricultural area, “allowing visitors to take part in agricultural or complementary activities on the property” (Marques, 2006, p. 151), such as, the wine-making process activities carried out in the vineyard properties of Douro and Tâmega regions (north of Portugal) in order to satisfy the niche market in study. Additionally, those activities are executed by both agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members to connect the visitors to the farming

activities. On the other hand, the research made by McGehee, Kim, and Jennings (2007) defines “agritourism” as the “rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component” (McGehee et al., 2007, p. 280) but, according to Barbieri and Mshenga (2008), it is considered as “any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors” (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008, p. 168).

A “working farm”, which is a commonly term used to define agritourism, has been extremely ignored in the agritourism literature since no proper definition was given. Consequently, Clarke (1999, p. 27) stated that a “working farm” is the place “where the working environment forms part of the product from the perspective of the consumer” and, according to the 29 semi-structured interviews conducted by Clarke in England, Scotland and Wales, the respondents highlighted the visible and tangible elements of the farming life to define a “working farm”, which were the “livestock and crops (68%), working farm machinery (17%) or observable farming activities (12%)” (Clarke, 1999, p. 42). As a result, a “working farm” is where the agricultural activities are put into practice, in which may depend on the nature of tourist contact (passive, direct or indirect) and on the level of authenticity (staged agritourism or authentic agritourism) (Phillip, S., Hunter, C. and Blackstock, K., 2010).

In the sequence of Phillip et al. (2010) study, it is suggested that the contact between tourism and agrarian environment may be direct, indirect, and passive. The direct contact happens when the agricultural activity has a tangible element in the tourist experience (e.g., extraction of bee honey). The indirect contact relies on a contact related with the agricultural production (e.g., sale of meals) and, at last, the passive contact means that the only connection made with the agricultural activities are through the farm location, since the “tourism and agriculture are operated independently” (Phillip et al., 2010, p. 755).

On contrary, authenticity is a grown suitable concept for a lot of different usages and contexts, which “connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real or the unique” (Sharply, 1994 cited in Wang, 1999, p. 350). As a result, the sociological studies and the structural division of social establishments made by Erving Goffman (1959) served as a base for MacCannell (1973) to explore the authenticity in the tourist field. In the first hand, the front and back regions identified by Goffman (1959) in the authenticity sphere were considered by MacCannell, being (1) the front region defined as

place where hosts and consumers meet and (2) the back region is what the consumers generally do not see because it is where everything is prepared. When considering agritourism, the back region is crucial to provide an authentic and involving experience to the tourists but, there is also a term extremely important that features the overall tourism and the agritourism, being the “staged authenticity”.

According to MacCannell (1973), there was a transformation of traditional roots into cultural experiences due to the modern society and a consequence of it are the several ways of staging the authentic, “from reproduced settings that appear to be authentic (e.g., a model farm) to organized visits that allow tourists a glimpse back-stage (e.g., farm tours)” (Phillip et al., 2010, p. 756). So, the touristic experience is always mystified since the lie contained “presents itself as a truthful revelation [being important for the agritourism because it will fulfil the tourists] desires in order “to see life as it is really lived” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 101).

2.2. Typology of agritourism

The figure 2.1. represents the typology framework of Agritourism based on three discriminators described before (“working farm”, “tourists contact with agricultural activity” and “authenticity”), in which resulted in five types for defining the sub-sector of Rural Tourism. Such approach was developed by Philip et al. (2010) because of the existing inconsistencies related to the definitions of agritourism. Nevertheless, the authors took into consideration “activities and products systematically according to (...)” (Philip et al., 2010, p. 756) the discriminators mentioned above.

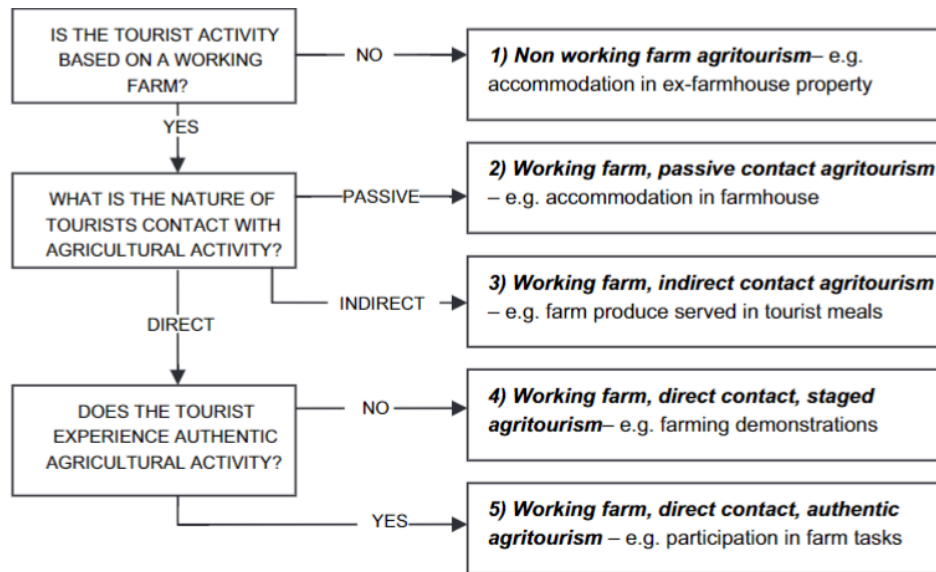


Figure 2.1. Agritourism typology

Source : Philip et al. (2010)

- 1) **Non-working farm agritourism (NFW).** It comprises “activities where the non-working farm [...] serves for scenery purposes” (Arroyo et al, 2013, p. 41) and where its agricultural activities belong to a tourist product. It may be also included farm heritage attractions and the access to the farm [e.g., walk or practice hunting “where the working farm is not central to tourist activity” (Phillip et al., 2010, p. 756).
- 2) **Working farm, passive contact agritourism (WFPC).** There is a slight contact between tourism and agriculture, which means that the small interaction between the visitor and the working farm will allow “farmers to continue their agricultural activities without having interferences (e.g., attending a wedding in a vineyard)” (Arroyo et al., 2013, p. 41). Therefore, the tourism will be seen as a discrete activity and a supplementary income for the working farm.
- 3) **Working farm, indirect contact agritourism.** This type of agritourism is considered “indirect” since the contact is made more through the agricultural products than the practice of the agricultural activities itself (e.g., holiday cottages).
- 4) **Working farm, direct contact, staged agritourism.** “Through reproduction (e.g., model farm) or organization (e.g., farm tour) of agricultural activities for tourism” (Phillip et al., 2010, p. 757), this kind of agritourism refers to activities completely authentic, staged, purposely put and predetermined for tourists experience agricultural

activities (e.g., farming demonstration – extract honey; physical contact with farm animals).

- 5) **Working farm, direct contact, authentic tourism.** Here, the agritourism tourists experience and participate in real agricultural activities and have direct contact with those authentic activities. For instance, “WWOOFing” is a worldwide program that accepts individuals willing to work in a farm in exchange for food and accommodation.

Based in the previous framework, Ciervo (2013) proposed a new category for defining agritourism (figure 2.2.) that is related with the authentic agricultural activity, in a way that its definition is similar to the category number five (Working farm, direct contact, authentic tourism). However, the new category named as “open agritourism” differs from it due to the “tourist’s purpose for experiencing authentic agricultural activities [, such as]: knowledge rural values and lifestyle, learning agricultural and handcraft activities” (Ciervo, 2013, p. 331). In other words, the “open agritourism” refers to the guests that want more than participate in the authentic activities, they desire to learn and acquire knowledge about the farm and its practices. For example, *Casolare Alberelli* is an agritourism farmhouse that promotes activities related with medicinal herbs and the guests may take a tour to learn how to find, collect and dry herbs.

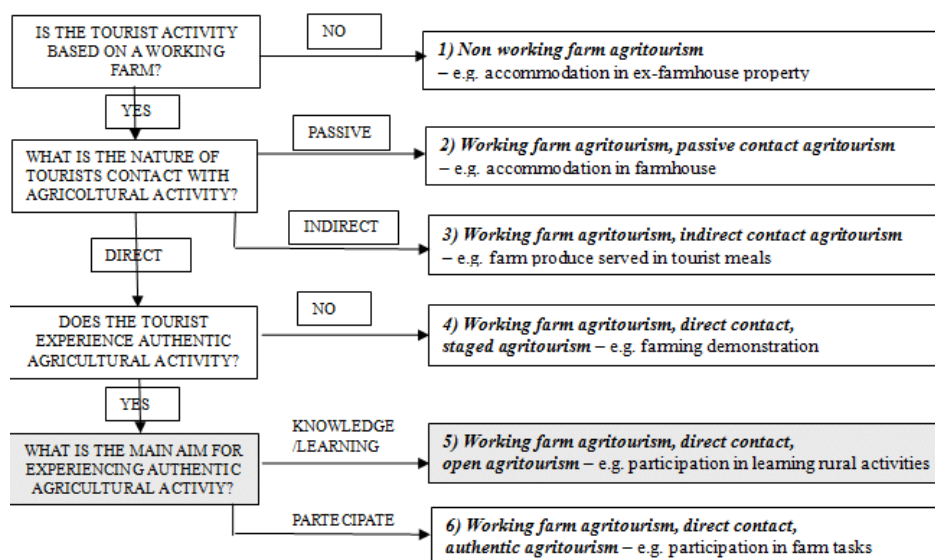


Figure 2.2. Agritourism typology according to Ciervo

Source: Ciervo (2013, p.332), adapted upon Philip et al. (2010, p. 756)

2.3. Agritourism in Italy

The history of the Italian agritourism begins after the World War II because of the immersive migration (from rural to urban areas), emigration and the non-profitable small-scale farming. As a result, the Italian government had to act also due to the high value that Italians give to the camp life, traditions, and small-scale productions. The outcome of the government action was the publication of a law called “Agriturismo” in 1985, giving the farmers certain benefits related to tax breaks, finance and the willing to open the farmhouses for holidays. Conversely, the rural areas would be reborn by increasing the farm income, creating new jobs, and belonging in the tourism sector (Everts, 2020; *Fontechiara Agriturismo Le Marche Italy*, undated; Travel Oregon, 2022, pp. 3-73; Travel Oregon, 2022a).

The 1985 “Agriturismo” law was a success and after it, many other European Union countries started to apply similar policies in their own countries in order to achieve the same benefits in their rural areas. Moreover, the Italian agritourism became strictly regulated in terms of the hotel and restaurant sectors, being mandatory for some farmers to take a license in an agency or office that takes care of the financial accounting, hygiene, sanitation, hospitality, and law of the working farm (Everts, 2020).

It was also established three types of agritourism with a great focus in the meals served: “one that provides light meals or self-service snacks; [other] that offers full-service meals; and [another] that provides farm holidays that include meals, lodging and other activities” (Travel Oregon, 2022a). Even so, the agritourism farmers may also sell farm products including locally produced honey, jam, wines, pasta and so on.

2.3.1. The Italian agritourism and COVID-19

The Italian agritourism suffered a serious blow with the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when comparing with the year of 2019 due to its closure during the lockdown. Promptly, the Italian Institute of Services for the Agricultural Food Market (ISMEA) predicted a loss of 970 million euros for 2020, which means that the agritourism “went from 1,56 billion in 2019 to 802 million euros in 2020” (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 38) in terms of earnings.

The disruption of the supplementary income and activities (e.g., accommodation offer, cultural, health, sporting, and educational activities) inevitably contributed to the collapse of the average annual rate (figure 2.3.) of + 4.8% that was constantly growing until 2019. Hence, the agricultural element of the companies became the main source of income, being essential to face the challenging months (particularly in the 2nd and 4th quarter of 2020) and remain in the agritourism market.

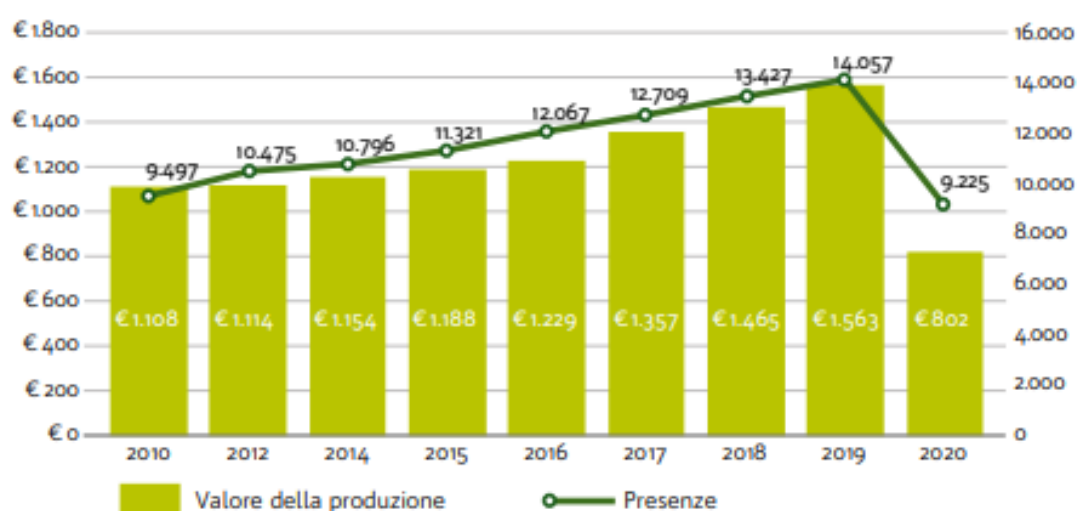


Figure 2.3. Value of production and farm stays from 2010 until 2020

Source: Finizia, Fratto, Galasso, Hausmann, Nucera and Selmi (2021)

In general, the Italian tourism in 2020 declined 53% of the overnight stays compared with the previous year (2019) and, when considering the agritourism industry, there was a decrease of 34% (9.2 million overnight stays in 2020) by virtue of the international (-57.9%) and domestic (-2.7%) demands. This means that there was a loss of 1.555.087 tourists (41.4% arrivals) and 4.832.606 overnights stays (34.4%) thanks to the pandemic. Furthermore, the non-hotel accommodations and the campsites, which are also included in the agritourism sector, growth in the number of arrivals while in the private accommodations of the rural areas slowed down (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 38-39).

The table 2.1. shows how the domestic demand mitigated the hard impact caused by the decrease of the international demand (72% of guests drop and 96% of overnight stays) between 2019 and 2020. Hereupon, the domestic arrivals ended up representing 70% of the overall market and the overnight stays went from 42% to 62%, being the first time

after the 2000's. Plus, the average stay was boosted by 4 days (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 44).

Table 2.1. Arrivals and overnight stays in 2016 and 2020

Years	Agritourism					Variation 2019/2020
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Arrivals	3.038.397	3.242.443	3.432.717	3.760.734	2.205.647	1.555.087
Italian arrivals	1.658.335	1.731.827	1.792.305	1.965.185	1.535.715	429.470
Foreigner arrivals	1.380.062	1.510.616	1.640.412	1.795.549	669.932	1.125.617
Overnight stays	12.067.694	12.709.327	13.427.706	14.057.535	9.224.929	4.832.606

Source: Self-elaboration (2022), based on the National Rural Network Program 2014-2020

Furthermore, Finizia et al. (2021) elaborated a report through the *Programma Rete Rurale Nazionale* 2014-2020 (National Rural Network Program 2014-2020) comparing the data of 2020 and 2021 and, it confirms the tendency mentioned before. In fact, the domestic demand surpassed the international demand, which means that the Italians represented an increase of 44,9% and a decreased of 12,7% and, the foreigners (mainly European) raised up 32,5% and declined 40,9% in 2021, with respect to the year 2020.

Regarding the guest's origin countries (figure 2.4.), Germany represented the highest number of arrivals with 578.569 (32,7%) guests in 2019 and 307.988 (46,0%) in 2020 with a variation of – 46.6% between those years. In second, there were the Netherlands in 2019 with 133.154 (7,4%) and Switzerland with 64.800 (9,7%) in 2020. In third place, France rules with 132.446 (7,4%) in 2019 arrivals and Netherlands with 62.986 (9,4%) in 2020 (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 47).

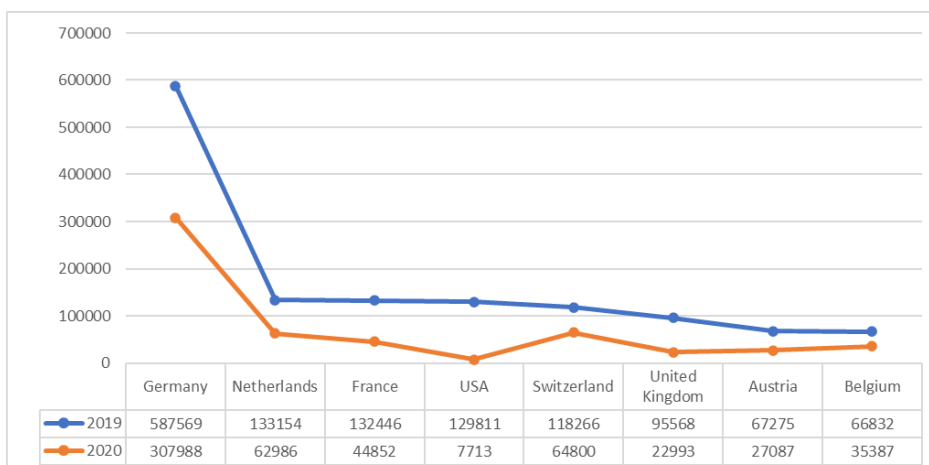


Figure 2.4. Arrivals according to the origin country

Source: Self-elaboration (2022), based on Finizia et al. (2021)

Due to severe restrictions in terms of circulation within continents, the European tourists dominated the arrivals in comparison to the non-European ones. As a result, the United States of America (EUA) presented - 94.1%, which means that there were 129.811 arrivals in 2019 and 7.713 in 2020 but, Denmark (- 81.1%) and United Kingdom (- 75.9%) had also considerable variations percentages (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 47).

When considering the arrivals in the Italian regions (figure 2.5.) Toscana, P.A. Bolzano, and Veneto are the three regions that lost more arrivals with the pandemic but, they keep receiving more tourists than others. In 2020, the regions mentioned above had 548.441, 326.541 and 175.182 arrivals, accordingly. Also, the region where the *Agriturismo Beatilla* is located in Lombardy region, got less 93.486 (- 48.9%) arrivals, which means 191.254 in 2019 and 97.768 in 2020 (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 49).

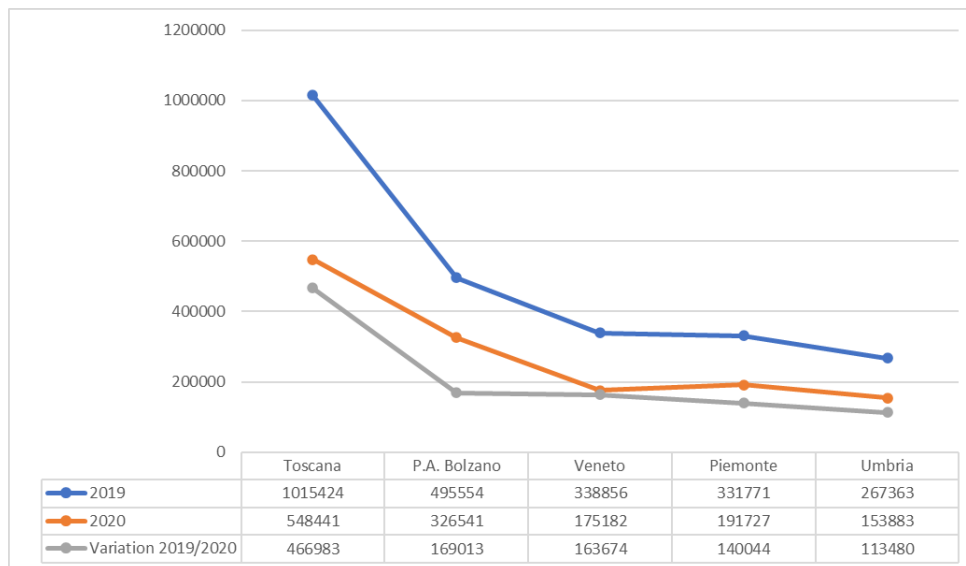


Figure 2.5. Arrivals per Italian region in 2019 and 2020

Source: Self-elaboration (2022), based on Finizia et al. (2021)

Unavoidably that the positive trend of the farm tourism demand was affected, in particular the annual 7.8% arrival average rate for the period between 2015 and 2019. On the other hand, tourist's behaviors and habits changed “in search of solutions that are often close to one’s home and at the same time safe, [autonomous, sustainable] with large open spaces and connected to the natural context” (Finizia, A. et al., 2021, p. 44). Thus, the next subchapter will address the “new tourist” of the Italian agritourism after de COVID-19.

2.3.2. The “new tourist” of the post COVID-19

According to Finizia, A. et al (2021), the post COVID-19 showed a renewed touristic demand with different behaviors, when comparing to the previous years, being also due to the exponential use of internet and e-commerce (more 24.5% in 2020 than 2019).

After a long period of tension and lockdown, some serious health problems emerged like, xenophobia, ethnocentrism and fear of crowdedness, which made the “new tourist” more exigent and attentive to detail (for example, cleaning and services quality) in order to have fun and relax more than ever.

This “new tourist” desires:

- Huge and open spaces,

- Autonomy of the lodgment,
- Sustainable and eco-friendly accommodations,
- Isolated destinations,
- And safety measures properly applied.

In relation to the “new tourist” behavior, the two main changes involve the way of booking and the trip type. Firstly, there was an increase of online bookings (from 58.4% in 2019 to 65.9% in 2020) and of “direct booking without the use of online intermediaries (Tour Operator, Agency or Online Platform, (...)) [which was - 72% comparing to 2020]” (Finizia, A. et al., 2021, pp. 16) .So, the guests started to directly contact the accommodations through phone or proper website to book stays, preferentially at last minute. Secondly, the “new tourist” prefers short trips with good cancellation politics and less crowded places since it is easier to keep up and maintain with the hygiene and anti-COVID-19 measures (Finizia, A. et al., 2021).

Although the “new tourist” represents most of the post COVID-19 guests, there are still some that are insecure, nervous and afraid, generating selective, meticulous and hard to please clients.

At last, the agritourism demand may be resumed into three different segments: family, smart-working workers, and elderly people (Finizia, A. et al., 2021).

2.3.3. Agritourism resilience

Despite all the information presented in the last two subchapters, the Italian agritourism shown to be “an adaptive, [resilient] tourism sector and quite agile in devising diverse solutions when experiencing any socio-economic crises” (Chin & Musa, 2021, p. 3), taking in account that the Italian farms embraced the pandemic through the diversification of their economic activities in order to remain profitable, competitive, sustainable and innovative. For instance, the farmers adjusted and developed their activities by offering certain services: (a) Direct products and/or meals delivered at home or farms to face the increasing “demand of farm fresh products sold at [more] competitive prices than supermarkets” (Chin & Musa, 2021, p. 3); and (b) hospitality to the nurses and doctors working in the most affected areas of COVID-19. Yet, the Italian farmers united forces with their agency or office to attract touristic demand through the creation of two

innovative initiatives, “Agribond” and “Save the Farm”. In the first place, “Agribond” was born in Puglia region but promptly spread for all over the regions because of the economic advantage for the customers and farmers. This initiative consisted in a voucher offering a service (lunches, overnight stays, or full package) until December 30 of 2020, where the customers would pay in advance and, immediately after the re-opening of the business, would be able to use and enjoy it. In case of the farm does not reopen to the public, the same voucher could be used to buy typical products (e.g., homemade honey, jams, or vegetables). In the second place, “Save the Farm” is another initiative that aims to help the small rural farmers and their employees and stakeholders to strength their bond, in which their consumers may “adopt fruit trees, follow their growth and allocate fruit to the employees and customers of one’s company” (Buonaccorsi, 2020, p. 2). Afterwards, the organic fruits are delivered within 24h to 48h in the office or at home after its harvesting (Buonaccorsi, 2020; Montagnoli, 2020; Piochi, undated).

In addition, the European Commission also supported the industry’s workers, the “farming and agritourism sectors that suffered corporate liquidity problems due to Covid-19 (...)” (Buonaccorsi, 2020, p. 3) with a five-year loan, being possible for the ISMEA lend 30,000 euros to each company without charging interests. Apart from this, the Italian state suspended the payments of the social security related with the insurance premiums and it also suffered some pressure to help the sector with holiday bonuses and other support measures through the funds of the Rural Development Plan, which resulted in the 19 May decree called “Relaunch”.

Bearing in mind the above, the pandemic triggered the agritourism capability to face and resist to any adversity that may appear. “(...) Everything has changed [and the farmers had to] find themselves supporting new investments (...) in a clear and targeted way, without wasting resources” (Buonaccorsi, 2020, p. 3). So, an effective farm management is crucial in a multifunctional sector with a rigorous urban planning and sanitation rules, meaning that the new Italian agritourism design is arising towards innovation, sustainability, and digitalism.

2.4. Innovation, sustainability, and digitalism

Innovation is one of the three cornerstones for the continuous agritourism development, profitability, and competitiveness. According to Schumpeter (1919), the term in discussion is “the key process of economic change” (Hospers, 2005, p. 23) since those “new combinations” will be able to disturb and even, destruct the current economic structure to create a new one. Then, innovations may be the introduction of a new product, production method and a new way of business organization.

On the other hand, John Kao (2015) mentions innovation as the “capability of continuously achieving a desired future” (Kao, 2015 cited in Training National Contact Points Academy, 2015) through the creation of something new and valuable that emerges with the fusion of knowledge, perspectives, and disciplines.

In terms of agritourism, innovations used to appear with a long delay but despite that, it is becoming extremely vital to survive in an extensive and competitive market where the agritourism farms “must constantly change and strive to surprise tourists with new products and offers” (Roman & Grudzień, 2021, p. 13). These new agritourism products are the combinations of “tangible and intangible heritage assets [in order to bring out the] authenticity of the place and capturing its soul” (Palmi & Lezzi, 2020, p. 16) to consequently, fulfil tourists needs and desires. In fact, the tourists of nowadays want more than a safe and calm stay, they expect to be surprised and be part of a memorable experience due to the farm’s originality with its products or services built and developed from scratch. For instance, “green care” is an example of an innovative service of agritourism that provides a natural therapy through the healing power of nature (e.g., gardening, animal-assisted activities, care farming and among other activities) and WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is an example of an innovative educational program for volunteers that desire to learn “how to farm [in a sustainable way], taking part in the organic agriculture program and learning culture” (WWOOF, not dated) without paying for lodging and board. After the 2020 COVID-19 break, one of the many innovations was the annual “AgriTour” event that had to be adapted to an online version, full of workshops, seminars, and conferences. Besides promoting the Italian agritourism inside and out of the country, this event is extremely important to “meet the professional market, (...) enhance the rural hospitality sector and culture, to promote

technical and training updates, technologies, and supplies” (*Il Salone*, 2021; *Salone Nazionale dell’Agriturismo e dell’Agricoltura multifunzionale*, undated).

Taking always in account the right market segment, innovation is an opportunity for agritourism farms develop new and existing tourist products, grow in the market, boost tourism attractiveness, remain competitive and be profitable. Moreover, it will be responsible for the improvement of some socio-economic factors (e.g., creation of new jobs and increasing of rural community income) and, for the stimulation and strengthening of sustainability and its practices into the rural community (Chin & Musa, 2021 and, Roman & Grudzień, 2021).

Secondly, the term sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations Brundtland Commission, 1987 cited in United Nations, 2014). In 1990, the concern to face the negative impacts of tourism gave rise to the concept of “sustainable tourism”, which meets the needs of present tourists and host regions without compromising the future generations and their opportunities. Consequently, tourism has been seen as a potential sector with the power to contribute for the worldwide sustainability and for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In a local scale, sustainability in tourism has three main focuses: resources (preserve natural capital and local culture), activity (sustain the economic capital invested) and community (sustain the social capital of the agents involved). So, the development and strengthening of sustainable practices within rural areas are vital to progress in agritourism and respect the complex relationship of impact and dependency between tourism and environment. In other words, the environment (natural, man-made, social, and cultural) must be protected and preserved because the tourism needs the environment, even if it brings negative or positive outcomes. For example, the agritourism farm *Il Cavicchio*, which is located in Bologna (Emilia Romagna Region), takes into consideration the sustainable practices through the low energy consumption (e.g., solar thermal panels and an intelligent hydraulic system that irrigates the production from reservoirs filled with rainwater or melted snow), the use of natural materials (cork and wood) in the facilities and the employment of natural fertilizers to reduce the daily

polluting impacts and keep the ecosystem balanced (Saarinen, 2006; *Ecology – Il Cavicchio*, not dated).

Thirdly, the digitalization is a relatively recent agritourism tool defined as “the process of moving to a digital business (...) to provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities” (Gartner, 2022). In the context of the Italian agritourism farms and the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization faced several challenges that, at the end, were seen as opportunities to progress, connect and contribute to farm resilience.

In a study carried out by the University of Pisa within the International Master of Science in Rural Development, Laura Martinelli and Franca Benardi highlighted the digitalization in their agritourism farms especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Located in Gasfagnana (Tuscany Commune), *La grotto della Faina* and *Il Corniolo* are two farms focused on the territorial development and community engagement managed by Laura and Franca, respectively.

Both farms have a great digital interface control that includes several booking channels due to the emergence of online platforms (e.g., Booking, AirBnb, Agritourism.it, HotelBeds and among many others). Furthermore, there was not only the promotion and direct sell of agricultural products with the online application called foodbarrio.com as there was a constant investment in the products storytelling to engage and “(...) maintain a [virtual] relationship with the local community” (Metta & Mazzocchi, 2020).

On the other hand, the digitalization of tourism experiences and social media are two other practices strongly adopted during the pandemic to increase visibility, regain public trust, reach out potential customers and transmit a safer destination image (Chin & Musa, 2021). Primarily, e-food and e-wine destinations like Italy saw in the virtual tourism the opportunity to provide interactive online tourism experiences due to the different types of activities that the virtual space may carry, such as: digital home-dining, online cooking classes and courses, agri-crowdsourcing, virtual food tours and remote food tasting events. For instance, the restaurant *Vitique* (Greti, Firenze, Toscana) introduced two virtual and unique initiatives to be lived at home, the “Vitique Social Dinner” and the “Vitique Chef Tabl-e”. In both events, it arrives at the participants home the same food and wine but, in the first initiative, the dinners are “virtually connected” to meet new people and appreciate the dishes and, in the second initiative, the participants may enter in the restaurant kitchen to talk and listen some advice about food preparation with the

chef Antonio Guerra. At last, social media is considered by Chin & Musa (2021) as an effective tourism crisis management tool for allowing the engagement and awareness of potential customers to visual representations shown via Instagram and Facebook platforms. Those visual representations aim to pass on a better and safer perception of the place, making the social media users connected and present in the place (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2020; Centrale, 2020).

CHAPTER 3. THE INTERNSHIP

3.1. *Agriturismo Beatilla*



Figure 3.1. *Agriturismo Beatilla*

Source: *Agriturismo Beatilla* official website (2021)

Agriturismo Beatilla (figure 3.1.), whose origins date back to 1457, is currently an agritourism company managed by two brothers, Beatrice and Luca Bornoffi, who wish to make the mission of the place a reality, “make you feel at home, giving you a smile”.

Located in *Parco del Mincio (Mântua)* and near to the famous *Bosco Della Fontana*, *Beatilla* was the entity chosen to execute the internship and represents a smart and an innovative way that amplifies the agritourism action sphere in a sustainable, scenic, and touristic way. For this reason, this business is more than a simple farmhouse accommodation with its interactive activities, it offers a new environment through the fusion of art, eco design, nature, sustainability, and recycling. These elements were put together in each room and corner of *Beatilla* thanks to the owner and artist Luca Bornoffi

and, as he said, “we are surrounded by a thousand colors by a sea of objects, let's take them apart ... so let's assemble and color them” (Bornoffi, 2020). Hence, the company won the prestigious award of “Isnart-Guida alle Imprese Turistiche di Qualità” in 2008 and it is considered one of the most sustainable agritourism companies of *Mântua*.

Concerning its guests, their majority are Italians, and the minority comes from Germany, France, and Netherlands. However, they all seek peace, tranquility, nature, a familiar hospitality, and some, just want to rest due to the long bicycle path between *Mântua* and *Peschiera Del Garda* or work.

3.2. Characterization and services



Figure 3.2. Breakfast room

Source: Booking (2021)



Figure 3.3. Room *Pomodoro*

Source: *Agriturismo Beatilla* website (2021)

The *Agriturismo Beatilla* has 4 rooms and 5 apartments that were completely restored with recyclable products found on the farm and barns. Therefore, each of them has complementary products for the kitchen (e.g., coffee expresso, sugar, tea and a bottle of water) and bathroom (e.g., vanity kit, shower cap, shampoo and soap) and they also represent a color, being the main reason of its names, such as: *Camera Zucca*, *Melanzana*, *Giallo Piccolo*, *Rosa*, *Pomodoro* (figure 3.3.), *Lampone*, *Mela Verde*, *Apartamento Zucca* and *Mandarino*. Additionally, *Agriturismo Beatilla* offers the following services and initiatives:

- External garden with kids' games,
- Free covered car/bike parking,

- Lecture room called *La sala Beatilino*, which also offers free wi-fi,
- Breakfast delivery (from 7:30 am to 9:30 am), since before COVID-19 it was made in a breakfast room (figure 3.2.) as a buffet,
- Hot drinks buffet (from 7:30 am to 10 am),
- Little fridge in the reception area with water (sparkling and natural) and beer,
- Concierge service through the provision of informative brochures about the main places of interest to visit and eat,
- Kitchen lessons,
- Yoga classes,
- Bikes to rent and bike tours,
- Trekking and walking tours, especially in the *Bosco Della Fontana*,
- Horseback riding,
- Farm tours to explain the agricultural processes (e.g., growth of the vegetables, field cereals, fodder and small fruits),
- Temporary art galleries,
- Art workshops and,
- Excursions to some known sites (e.g., *Lago di Garda*, *Mântua City* and Water Park in *Peschiera del Garda*).

The wide range of *Beatilla* services has the main goal of satisfying guests needs and desires from a young to an older age. It also aims to provide a full, familiar and memorable experience, in terms of agritourism activities, which means that the business is more than a place that offers rooms to spend the night.

3.3. Organizational structure

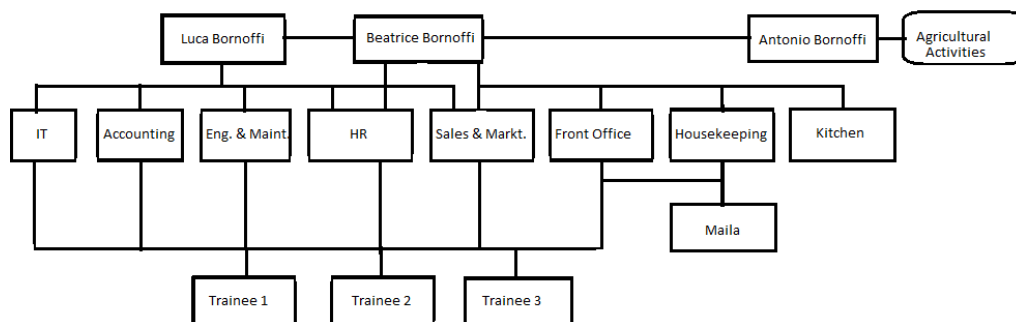


Figure 3.4. Organizational structure of *Beatilla*
Source: Self elaboration (2022)

The figure 3.4. represents the organizational structure of the *Agriturismo Beatilla*, in which it outlines the hierarchical relationships between the few members of the organization.

Even if most of the organization members are family, the existing departments are crucial to have an organized and profitable business. It is divided into 8 departments: information technology (IT), accounting, engineering & maintenance, human resources (HR), sales & marketing, front office, housekeeping, and kitchen departments.

In this sense, the administration of *Agriturismo Beatilla* is mainly made by two brothers and business partners, Luca and Beatrice Bornoffi.

In one hand, Luca Bornoffi is responsible for the information technology, sales & marketing (essentially, online), human resources, accounting, and engineering & maintenance departments. On the other hand, Beatrice Bornoffi oversees the front office, human resources, sales (in person and by cellphone), kitchen and housekeeping Departments. In addition, Antonio Bornoffi, Luca's and Beatrice's father, assures the constant operation of the agricultural part of the business in order to maintain the status of agriturismo accommodation and save money.

There is also one employee called Maila responsible for the cleanings (Housekeeping department) and, thanks to the ERASMUS + program, the business receives around 5 to 9 trainees per year for periods between 2-6 months to work in several departments simultaneously in exchange of knowledge and professional, inter-personal and linguistic skills development. So, all the trainees are prepared to work in a team environment to achieve the same goals, being the constant communication key for the well-functioning of the business.

The following information refers to the detailed duties and responsibilities of each member of the *Agriturismo Beatilla*.

Luca Bornoffi is in charge of:

- Support and update all the IT systems,
- Solve any IT issues,
- Promote the acquisition of any better and cheaper IT system or software,

- Make sure that all the business information and data are in a digital format,
- Online Marketing, especially through social media marketing, search engine optimization and pay-per-click advertising,
- Examine Google Ads analytics to know the best time and the exact target group and region to invest in the online marketing,
- Administrate and assure transparency between members of the company,
- Give training to the new interns,
- Maintain all the financial transactions,
- Elaborate an annual financial report (financial analysis),
- Prepare all the invoices to the guests that asks for it,
- Analyze the market and buy the cheapest products,
- Repair and maintain the machinery, all equipment and furniture,
- Elaborate more paintings to update the decoration of each room,
- Help Antonio Bornoffi with the agriculture activities (e.g., feed the horses and use the big machinery in the fields).

Beatrice Bornoffi is responsible for:

- Reservations in the system from online platforms (e.g., Booking), cellphone and in person,
- Welcome the guests and provide information about the accommodation and surrounding touristic attractions,
- Registration of the guests in the system,
- Take care of guest's bills,
- Check-out's,
- Give training to the new interns,
- Sale of rooms in person and by cell phone,
- Make sure that there is enough food and materials for the Kitchen department,
- Help Maila with the cleanings,
- Put sheets and towels to wash and pull them,
- Fold sheets and towels,
- Prepare beds,
- Refill the rooms with the complementary products for the kitchen and bathroom.

Maila is in the lead for:

- The cleanings in the rooms and common areas,
- Take out the trash,
- Prepare beds,
- Refill the rooms with the complementary products for the kitchen and bathroom.

The interns, after one month of training, may participate in all departments by themselves without asking for Luca and Beatrice assistance. For this reason, they are responsible for several tasks, in which will be detailed in the subchapter 3.5.

Antonio Bornoffi is entrusted with:

- Managing the fields,
- Watering the wheat and vegetables,
- Feed the horses,
- Make sure that all the fields are organized and well treated.

Noteworthy is that some members of the company have the same duties because they use to execute them alternately. For instance, Maila can do the beds on Thursday but, if the accommodation is fully booked, she may not do it in the next day due to the high quantity of work. For this reason, Bea or one of the trainees will do it.

3.4. Internal and external analysis

SWOT Analyses is a strategic planning tool designed “to evaluate a company’s competitive position and to develop strategic planning” (Kenton, 2021) considering both internal and external variables to understand what’s going on inside and outside of the company.

Thus, this technique identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and it is used as a guide since it provides a realistic, fact-based, and data-driven panorama of the

business, being essential to conduct a successful strategy for the future in order to achieve the business goals.

Considering the internal and external environment of *Agriturismo Beatilla*, the table 3.1. reveals the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) of this business.

Table 3.1. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location, excellent for business and leisure, • Calm and quiet place, • Real farm with animals (e.g., horses, duchies, chickens, and other birds), • Home-made breakfast delivery, ideal for the COVID-19 situation, • Great customer service quality and attention to detail, • Big garden, • Unique and colorful reception area and rooms, • Well-equipped and renewed rooms and apartments, • Parking areas (out and indoors) • Strong communication via social media, • Familiar, friendly, and international STAFF, • Discounts for repeaters (if they get in touch with Beatrice Bornoffi firstly). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No swimming pool and gym, • Weak marketing and sales force, • Less activities/initiatives provided, • Repeated breakfast.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales force, • Marketing campaigns (especially online), • E-commerce, • Art expositions in the accommodation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitors, • Italy economic growth slowing down, • Stagnation of overall businesses, especially in the Lombardy Region.

Source: Own elaboration (2022)

Regarding the strengths, the accommodation is perfectly located near the city of *Mântua* and *Parco del Mincio*, which is a nice and calm place to relax and enjoy the surrounding

nature. On the other hand, it is a great stop for the workers that want to rest due to its proximity to the main road that connects Verona to Bologna or Florence.

Also, the fact of being a real farm with a big garden, fields and animals, it is an important element of strength due to the authentic experience provided. In addition, the home-made breakfast delivery in front of the room as a solution to respect the COVID-19 norms, highlights that experience due to the great acceptance and compliments by the guests.

Thanks to the owner and artist Luca Bornoffi, *Agriturismo Beatilla* has an exceptional design, decoration and renewed facilities and rooms/apartments with all the equipment's needed to attend all necessities. There is also a strong communication through Instagram (figure 3.5.) and Facebook as the two main social media with the post of pictures and attractive legends with the goals of maintaining guests and attracting new ones. Lastly, the great customer service quality with attention to detail and the familiar, friendly, and international STAFF are positive aspects of this business, as most of the guests return after the first stay and, for this reason, they can get discounts when getting in touch with Beatrice Bornoffi.

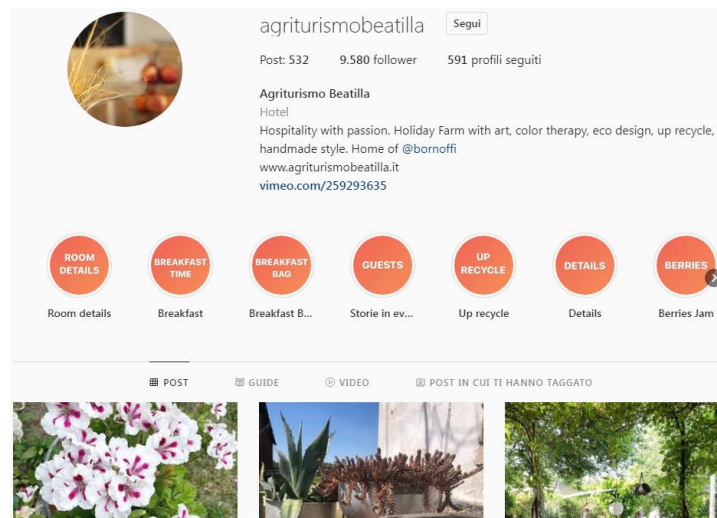


Figure 3.5. *Agriturismo Beatilla* Instagram feed

Source: *Agriturismo Beatilla* Instagram (2022)

When referring to weaknesses, there is a lack of facilities that could stimulate more bookings and consequently, more guests to come like a swimming pool and gym. Plus, the little profit gotten due to the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the business in a way that diminished the marketing, activities, and sales forces,

since it had to be used to cover the fixed costs and some variable ones that were really needed to the well-functioning of the business (e.g., electricity, water, food and disinfecting products – some of them mandatory to be in the market). Despite the delivery service was well accepted by the guests and, even if it is possible to make some changes due to health problems or preferences, the guests complained about the repetition of the breakfast when the stay lasted more than one night.

Thirdly, the online marketing and e-commerce may be two of the main opportunities to make this business grow. Then, the art exposition could be a factor of distinction among the competition.

To finish, the three major threats are the competitors, the Italian slow economical grow, and the stagnation of all kinds of businesses in the country. These elements will affect the demand, especially in a period that all companies and the country itself are trying to recover from the lost suffered during the pandemic.

3.5. Job description as a Hotel Manager Assistant intern

During the 5 months period as an intern at the *Agriturismo Beatilla* I worked on several departments, performing various tasks and responsibilities. Albeit I had an internship plan, I was constantly moving between some departments during all experience, especially after one month of training due to the skills acquired and to the business requirements.

At first, I worked in the housekeeping department as a housekeeper and room attendant, following the F&B department as a cooker (for the breakfast meals) and room service server and as a receptionist, concierge, and porter in the front office department. Then, I performed tasks as a maintenance technician in the engineering & maintenance department, as an accountant in the accounting department and finally, as a general marketing in the marketing department.

The next sub-chapters will describe the activities detailed and performed in each department as a Hotel Assistant Manager Intern in the *Agriturismo Beatilla*.

3.5.1. Housekeeping department

The housekeeping was the first department which I was assigned to, and it lasted the all 5-months internships. Primarily, I was trained as a housekeeper by Ivica (Croatian intern) and Maila (the cleaning lady) and then, as a Room Attendant by Ivica.

Normally, the housekeeper tasks were performed between 10 am until 12 am to clean and prepare the rooms for the next arrivals and subsequently, the room attendant between 1:30 pm and 8 pm would check the room standards.

3.5.1.1. Housekeeper

The main tasks performed as a housekeeper were:

- Disinfect the rooms,
- Collect any dirty linen, towels, and trash,
- Prepare the beds,
- Wash the room's floor and corridor,
- Clean and wash the reception, breakfast room and kitchen floors,
- Pull the clean linen and towels,
- Fold the linen and towels,
- Iron the linen,
- Support the cleaning lady, Maila.

3.5.1.2. Room attendant

As a room attendant, the main tasks were:

- Stock the amenities,
- Turn it on the heater,
- Check the high standards of cleanliness in the accommodation before 3 pm,
- Attend specific guest's requests.

All rooms and apartments are fully equipped, and it was of my responsibility to check if the rooms were cleaned and with conditions to fulfil the high-quality standards of the accommodation.

The following items could be found in the rooms:

- 1) Tea, coffee, sugar, natural water, coffee machine, hot water dispensers,
- 2) Toiletries, hair dryer,
- 3) Tv,
- 4) Hand sanitizer.

In case of apartments, it could be also found:

- 1) Dishes, cutlery, pots, and cups,
- 2) Fridge,
- 3) Microwave,
- 4) Stove and oven.

With this being said, the rooms and apartments offer several products and services with the main goal to provide a comfortable and memorable experience in an agritourism accommodation. But, upon request, other services may be provided such as:

- 1) Iron and ironing boards,
- 2) Extra blankets and towels,
- 3) Print or scan of documents,
- 4) Delivery of any kitchen utensil,
- 5) Change of the breakfast due to food restrictions, allergies or preferences.

3.5.1.3. Considerations

My experience in the Housekeeping Department as a Housekeeper and Room Attendant was heavy but, I end up learning more about this department and its importance for the well-functioning of the hospitality industry in terms of providing the required quality to its guests. Indeed, the housekeeping ensures a safe, fresh and comfort environment to not only its clients but also to its employees.

There was a cleaning lady, called Maila, that uses to perform her tasks in the morning (from 10 am to 12 am) however, since the internship was carried out in the low season, I worked intensively and mostly in this department because I had to finish some tasks that were not done in the morning by Maila. For that reason, it is important to mention that it

should be hired another cleaning lady to make the work less difficult and stressful to Maila and all trainees. In addition, a bonus value should be also given to the employees with the main goal of creating a happy, balanced, and respectful work environment.

Nonetheless, certain interpersonal skills were developed, such as: time management, attention, communication, and flexibility.

3.5.2. Food and beverage department (F&B)

The F&B department was the second field of the internship, in which I was introduced to perform the cooker and room service server duties. Hence, both were realized simultaneously.

In general, the F&B duties were done into two shifts, (1) the morning shift (from 7:30 am to 10 am) where the breakfast was placed for delivery and the hot drinks buffet were prepared and finally, (2) the afternoon shift (from 4 pm to 5:30 pm) where the items were cooked and prepared for the next day.

An important aspect that should be mentioned is that this department was subjected to some changes, in special after Covid-19 pandemic, in order to reduce the costs and face the demand, since it was much less than before. Those changes were:

- (1) Breakfast bag delivery: new service that includes the delivery of the breakfast in front of the door guests' rooms between 07:30 am and 09:30 am. Those bags include a slice of banana bread, orange juice, a banana, and yogurt with jam in the bottom and granola on top. Before COVID-19, the breakfast was made throughout a buffet in the breakfast room between 07:30 am and 10 am. However, to avoid unnecessary expenses and interaction between guests in a close room, the delivery was the option adopted by *Agriturismo Beatilla*.

The breakfast was included in the reservations made exclusively in *Beatilla Agriturismo* website (e.g., <https://www.agriturismobeatilla.it/>) and, for all the rest of the websites (e.g., <https://www.agriturismo.it/>; <https://www.hotelbeds.com/home>; <https://www.booking.com/>; <https://www.tripadvisor.com/>), there was an additional cost of 6 euros per person and night.

(2) Hot drinks buffet: during the wintertime in the reception and outside in the summertime between 7:30 am and 10 am. This buffet offers:

- Tea (Earl Grey, English Breakfast, Green tea, Red Fruits, Lemon, and Black tea),
- Coffee,
- Cold and hot milk,
- Honey.

Before the pandemic, the hot drinks buffet was made exclusively in the breakfast room.

(3) The end of homemade honey and jams: due to the time that requires to make it, it was worth it to buy it in the supermarket for a reasonable price.

Consequently, the changes described above brought positive outcomes in terms of food wasting and time management. In sum, the breakfast bag delivery was the solution after-COVID-19 to save food and money taking in account that certain proportions of food were put into the bag and, the delivery service saved time which could be used in other departments.

3.5.2.1. Cooker

After the Covid-19 strike, the quantity of F&B tasks was much less, especially due to the introduction of the breakfast bag. As a cooker, I worked in two different shifts, the first between 7:30 am and 10 am and the second, between 3 pm until 4:30 pm. Thus, the duties were:

- 1) Bake the banana bread: It was baked four banana breads in a row so then, the breads could be placed into the freezer with the main goal of saving time in busy days. When needed, the banana breads were taken from the freezer, and they were cut and put into recyclable papers to be set into the fridge in order to be used in the morning of the next day for the breakfast bag preparation,
- 2) Prepare the orange juice,
- 3) Put together the yogurt with jam and granola,
- 4) Count the quantity of bananas,

- 5) Prepare the breakfast bag in the morning (between 07:15 am and 9:30 am) with the items already reported before. A chocolate is added to the bag during Christmas time, and, upon request, the breakfast may change (e.g., an Italian guest requested a lactose free breakfast once).

3.5.2.2. Room service server

The duties related with this position occurred essentially during the morning shift due to the breakfast delivery from 7:30 am until 9:30 am but, in case of any request [e.g., food, drinks and products (ironing machine, kitchen utensils, ...)], it is possible to perform it in the afternoon shift as well.

3.5.2.3. Considerations

Taking in account that I have never worked in the F&B department; the experience was rewarding due to the efficiency and professionalism needed to perform all the tasks already described.

Even if the cooking was a simple task, the outcome of it was challenging because of the guest's quality expectations fulfilment. Also, the breakfast is a subject highly analyzed and criticized by the customers and that can be seen through the several online reviews that highlight it, being its majority positive.

Despite that, it must be pointed the lack of home-made products in the preparation of the breakfast. For instance, in many situations the guests thought that the products used were home-made but they are not and, it is important to be genuine and honest when dealing with individuals that are looking for an overall agritourism experience and not only for a place to spend the night.

3.5.3. Front office department

The Front office was another department that I got in touch during the internship. Firstly, I received training from the trainees and Beatrice, which is Luca's sister and business partner. And then, I was supervised by them and Luca.

The front desk is open from 7:30 am until 8 pm but, the busy shifts are, (1) the morning (7:30 am – 10 am) due to check-out's and, (2) the afternoon (3 pm – 8 pm) because of the check-in's, requires and reservations. Hence, I performed duties as a receptionist, concierge, and porter.

Nonetheless, it is important to outstand that this department requires responsibility and focus due to the fact that it is in the reception that happens the first contact between the company and the guests, being important to show how professional the *Agriturismo Beatilla* is to leave a great image. Especially in this business, it is key to pass over these three essential elements: familiar, friendly, and welcoming.

3.5.3.1. Receptionist

The main duties as a receptionist were:

- Check-in's between 3 pm and 8 pm,
- Check-out's between 7:30 am and 10 am,
- Collecting payments,
- Register the new guests in the software,
- Managing guests accounts,
- Prepare the housekeeping paper for the cleaning lady,
- Be in contact with the cleaning lady, in case of any change,
- Fill the breakfast paper for the next day,
- Inform Beatrice about new reservations,
- Offer two informational papers to the guests, (i) with the story and map of *Beatilla* and, (ii) with a restaurant list and major attractions of the region.

3.5.3.2. Concierge

As a concierge, I was just responsible to provide information about *Beatilla* and the surroundings attractions and restaurants.

3.5.3.3. Porter

Concerning this job, the only task was escorting all guests to the rooms or apartments, since there were not in the same building of the reception.

3.5.3.4. Considerations

The workers of the Front office department have a crucial role in terms of making the guests welcoming and happy, since the first image of the company is throughout them and, in terms of that, I did a good job.

Taking in consideration that most of the guests were Italians, I had to be even more smiley, friendly, and nice to make them feel comfortable with me due to my non-Italian nationality, which is something that the *Agriturismo* guests are not used to find. Normally, they expect a familiar and 100% Italian environment, and some old Italian families may not like to be received by a “foreigner” but, everything went well, and I did not have any conflict.

To conclude, the Front office department was the one that I most enjoyed because of the contact with the customer, being important to improve my languages skills. On the other hand, there is any additional recommendation to upgrade this department because everything is organized and prepared in accordance with the guests needs (e.g., the informational papers with the restaurants and attractions information's).

3.5.4. Engineering & maintenance department

The engineering & maintenance department was mainly performed throughout the position of maintenance technician during the period of the internship. Consequently, there was not a proper schedule for the tasks that had to be done because it was very unpredictable, since something could stop functioning at any time. I also did not have any training but, if I could not solve something, I would immediately contact Luca or Beatrice by WhatsApp.

3.5.4.1. Maintenance Technician

The following examples were tasks and situations that I had to detect, face, and find a solution as a maintenance technician:

- Heater failure – in several situations the heater stopped working due to the excessive use in the winter period. To solve it, I had to check it and change the batteries,
- Clean the heaters – The heaters in *Agriturismo Beatilla* are clean twice a year due to the cumulated dust,
- TV and television remote failure – After checking, I had to connect all the wires for the TV and change the batteries for the remote,
- Fix and put new paintings,
- Use of high-quality detergents to wash the sheets and towels,
- Clean the drier machine filters with a proper product.

3.5.4.2. Considerations

This department was the one that I less performed tasks due to two main reasons, (I) there was no need (II) or, I could not solve because of the complexity of the problem, being needed a professional for it.

Nonetheless, I ended up learning a few things that I will probably use it not only in the future of my professional life but also, in my personal life. However, this department is very simple and the main worker of it is Luca thanks to his artistic skills and, when the work is harder, he hires professionals.

3.5.5. Accounting department

With the training and supervision provided by Luca and Bea, I was able to execute accounting tasks for two months (November and December), especially during the afternoon shift.

3.5.5.1. Accountant

Then, the tasks performed as an accountant were:

- Organization of the receipts and invoices,
- Introduction of the receipts and invoices into the financial system,
- Creation of the Balance Sheet and the Profit & Loss statement in excel.

3.5.5.2. Considerations

The Accounting Department was the most challenging of them all, although just lasted two months (November and December in the afternoon shift).

The training provided by Luca was essential to understand how the financial department works in a small-medium company with a family sphere and, to apply the accounting and financial knowledge acquired in the masters.

An important aspect that should be highlighted is that the accounting department is extremely organized and professional, being great characteristics for the continuous success of the company.

3.5.6. Marketing Department

3.5.6.1. General marketing

Taking in account that this department is crucial to promote *Agriturismo Beatilla*, I was responsible to maintain the connection between the company and the guests. Also, I had to carry out all the tasks during the all 5-months internship.

Consequently, the work that I had to undertake was:

- Send email marketing campaigns,
- Monitor the efficacy of each campaign through the google analytics,
- Manage the social media, especially Instagram and Facebook,
- Post once per week in the Instagram and Facebook feed,
- Post three *instastories* daily,
- Reply to the customers private messages,

- Respond or react to the comments of the guests made in the published posts.

3.5.6.2. Considerations

Being in the marketing department requires creativity, strategy, and dedication and, those were the skills that I had to improve to prosper in this sector. In fact, several posts were made and many marketing emails were sent to reach the customers. Even if I had all the freedom to post and reply to the comments and messages whenever I want, it was mandatory to dedicate some time each day to remain active and establish a connection between the company and the current and future guests.

This department was the one that I enjoyed the most due to its interactivity with the customers online. Also, the organization and professionalism required stands out of this department and because of it, there is not any changed required.

4. RESULTS - AGRITURISMO BEATILLA AND COVID-19

During the 640 hours internship period, there were realized 35 informal interviews to *Agriturismo Beatilla's* guests. Since most of the interviewees were from Italy, the questions were made in the Italian language but, for the non-Italian individuals, they were made in English.

Normally, the interviews were carried out from November 1st and February 28th right after the check-in, from 3pm until 8pm, and they took around 10 minutes for each. In addition, the questions made were based in the studies already mentioned before. There was a good adhesion and collaboration to the questions, and they answered with clarity and interest.

In order to maintain anonymity, the name of each individual was not noted. On the other hand, the questions made were based in the studies mentioned above and in the *Agriturismo Beatilla* owner, Luca Bornoffi.

The following subchapters represent the interview results, its analyses and interpretation to achieve the main goal of the present report.

4.1. Population in Study

Of the 35 individuals interviewed (figure 4.1.), 71% were guests from Italy and 29% were from four European countries. Thus, most of the guests were Italians (71%), following the Germans (14%), the French's (9%) and the Dutch's (6%).

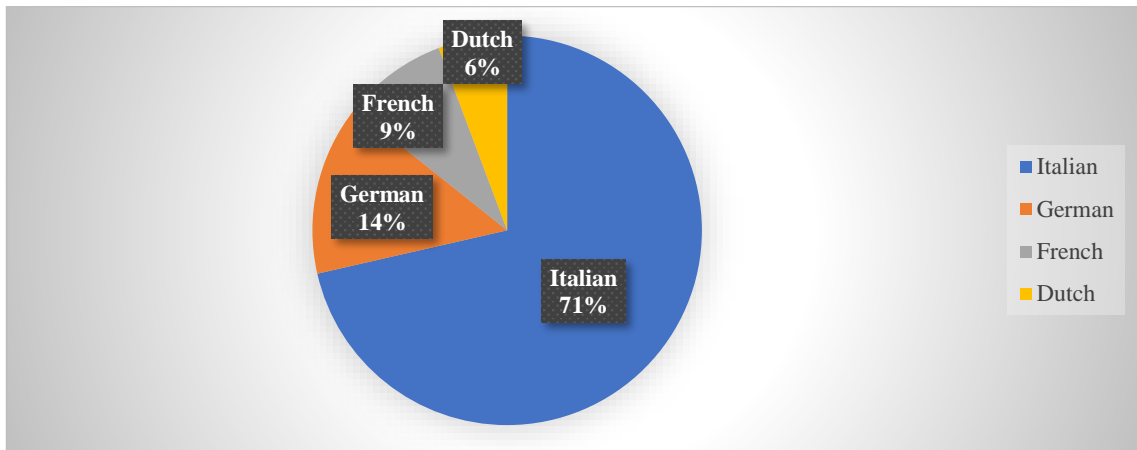


Figure 4.1. Interviewees nationalities

Source: Self-elaboration (2022)

When considering the previous studies, it was pointed out Germany, Netherlands, and France for 2019 and, Germany, Switzerland, and Netherlands for 2020. Based on *Beatilla* results, Germany remained in the first place and France overtaken the Netherlands.

The presented data in the literature review about the demand, it consolidated the predominance of the internal demand in contrast with the foreigner in the period of 2019 to 2021, being composed by the habitual Italian agritourism guests and the new individuals that discovered the Italian countryside after the pandemic. On contrary, the external demand was mostly European.

Considering the results of the *Agriturismo Beatilla* interviews, there were indeed a higher demand of Italians than foreigners for this kind of accommodation, since it was the easiest and, for some, cheapest option to escape from the stressful lifestyle of the city in search for leisure, freedom, and relaxing moments. In fact, 89% of all interviewees stated that the main motive of the visit was leisure and, 11% of them was the work.

Regarding the interviewees age (figure 4.2.), the margin of 40 to 60 years represented most of the guests in 2021, meaning that there was a greater demand of adults than young people.

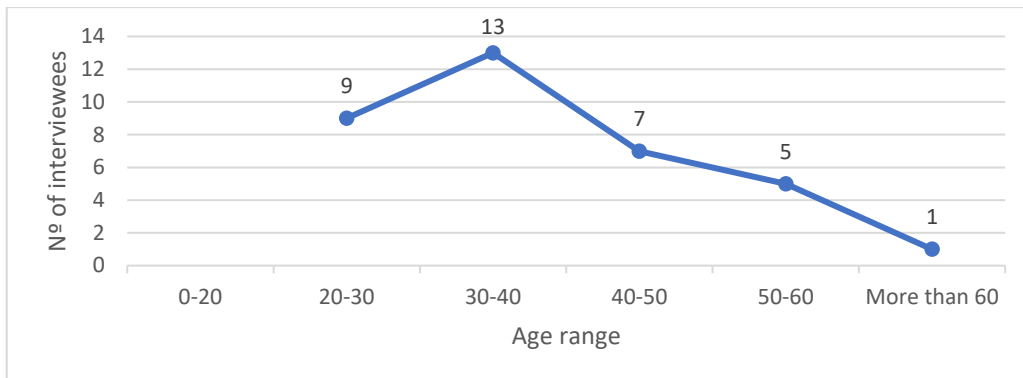


Figure 4.2. Interviewees age

Source: Self-elaboration (2022)

As the figure 4.3. states, the employed (46%) and the retired (37%) interviewees dominated the occupation percentage while the unemployed (11%) and student (6%) individuals constituted the minority.

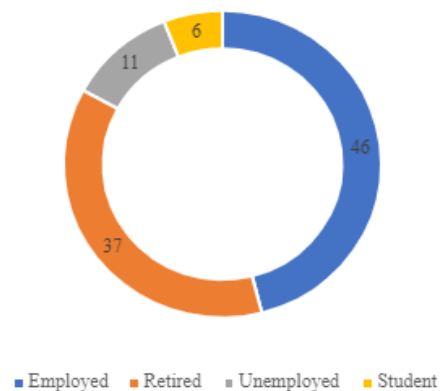


Figure 4.3. Interviewees occupation

Source: Self-elaboration (2022)

For the 5 months period, 2 of them were repeaters whilst the rest of them did not have the desire to repeat the stay in *Agriturismo Beatilla* and, even if the repeaters mentioned the attractive price and the welcoming staff as the main reasons to come back, the report describes some factors that makes them choose an agritourism accommodation, such as:

- The expansion of services,

- A more complete offer,
- The growth of the values connected to the food with the delivery services added to it,
- Offer of several outdoor activities,
- The Italian public is more demanding, exigent, and selective as opposed to the foreigners that are easy to please.

Hence, it proves that the high and diverse offer of accommodation and services determines the guests-decision when choosing the accommodation. Moreover, the fact that most of the guests are Italians, it is even harder to keep the client when their standards are high.

4.2. Main motivations after COVID-19

Considering the motivations after the pandemic in terms of choosing an agritourism accommodation (figure 4.4.), 31% of the respondents were interested in the isolation and safety provided, 26% searched for peacefulness, quietness, and relaxing moments, 17% were attracted to the price and 11% stated that the COVID-19 did not have any influence. In addition, 9% choose an agritourism accommodation because of the nature activities and 6% for the healthy lifestyle.

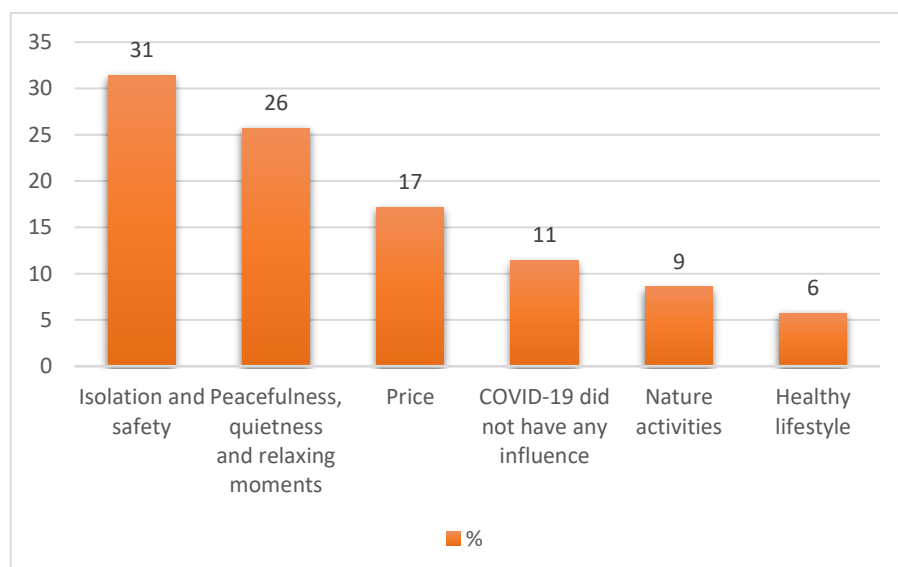


Figure 4.4. Motivations of the interviewees

Source: Self-elaboration (2022)

The study already mentioned above made by Westcott & Wang (2021) referred the isolation and the healthy lifestyle as the two main factors of choosing a rural tourism accommodation in order to experience a more idyllic lifestyle without the stress and worries of the city but, when centering in the agritourism accommodation, Musa (2021) refers the security that a nature-based tourism place may offer since it has a low risk of contamination and guarantees physical distance. On the other hand, the report of the National Rural Network Program 2014-2020 underlines four main motivations for 2021, such as: (1) the location (32,8%), especially near the touristic attractions or workplace; (2) the relax and stress-free (23,2%) provided; (3) the kitchen or restaurant (21,1%); and (4) the nature activities (10,8%).

With those three studies in mind, the general motivations of the guests in 2021 were related with the geographic position, tranquility, quality food and open spaces to practice the agritourism activities. Added to it, there were the safety and the need to escape of the city after a long lockdown but, the healthy lifestyle was the less mentioned in the results, which contradicts the study of Westcott & Wang (2021) but, not of the Musa (2021) because he points out about it in his work. Anyhow, COVID-19 brought new agritourism motivations, in which are related with the greater awareness in terms of choosing an accommodation where it guarantees security, physical distance and isolation.

4.2.1. *Agriturismo Beatilla* main motivation

Considering the great agritourism accommodation offered in the Lombardy region (1743 agritourism agencies, in which 963 of them offer lodging), which is one of the biggest Italian regions with this kind of accommodation, the *Agriturismo Beatilla*'s guests were also asked about their motivations in terms of choosing the accommodation under study. The interviewed guests specified the following elements:

- The positive reviews in the online booking platforms, particularly related with the COVID-19 safety measures (28%),
- Location - nearby the city of *Mântua*, which was designated as the Italian Capital of Culture in 2016 and its old town as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (%) (23%),
- Sustainable and eco-friendly accommodation (17%),
- Attractive price (13%),

- Location - at the end of the famous cycling path between *Verona* and *Mântua*, along the *Mincio* river (11%),
- The modern and colorful design (8%).

The National Rural Network Program 2014-2020 report also explored the matter of choosing a particular accommodation rather than another and the outcome is outlined below:

- Autonomy and external spaces of exclusive use (50,5%; e.g., room with its own kitchen and/or garden),
- Security guarantee and anti-COVID 19 measures (22%),
- Comfort and services (12,1%) (Finizia et al., 2021, pp. 60-75).

Despite of what was presented right above, there were some elements that were not included in the report results but, it is getting guest's attention. Influenced by the pandemic, those elements are becoming even more important when choosing a specific accommodation:

- Sustainability,
- Sale of agricultural products (seasonal ones) and/or served meals throughout sustainable methods and with proper certification (e.g., biological),
- Eco-friendly services (e.g., reuse of furniture, use of recycled materials or of renewable energy),
- Biodiversity and well-being of animals,
- Activities related to the rediscovery of traditional culture and rural villages,
- Initiatives that show the agricultural or cooking processes (e.g., home-made honey or making of traditional dishes workshops).

4.3. Surprising elements of *Agriturismo Beatilla*

Listen and understand the client is key for any company success in order to improve certain aspects and remain competitive in the market. For this reason, it is important to realize what surprises them the most and perceive their recommendations, since this is the only method to know the right way that should be followed without making bad investments.

In relation to the aspects that most surprise the *Agriturismo Beatilla* guests (figure 4.5.), its majority highlighted the service of delivering the breakfast bag (34%) and, the modern and colorful design (23%). Firstly, the delivery service in the room was one of the strategies adopted after the lockdown to avoid the contact between the guests-guests and guests-employees, in which it was very well received due to the several compliments to this service. Thus, the breakfast before COVID-19 was made through a buffet in the breakfast room but, with the pandemic, the business had to adapt to the new circumstances and follow the sanitary rules. Secondly, the unique eco, therapeutic and colorful design made by the artist Luca Bornoffi caught the attention of the guests in a way that it is considered one of the best elements of the accommodation.

The location (19%) and the peace (11%) provided surprised positively the guests also. However, the location was the third element chosen due to the proximity of the accommodation to the city center of *Mântua*, the famous *Bosco Della Fontana* and for being located by the end of the cycling path between *Verona* and *Mântua*. Then, another aspect highlighted was the welcoming staff (8%) that was willing to speak in several languages (e.g., Italian, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Croatian, Japanese, and French) surprised positively the guests. In addition, the staff always brought a familiar and friendly environment to made them feel at home and consequently, satisfied them in any additional need within their reach.

Essentially due to some week-end promotions and certain benefits in the accommodation official website (<https://www.agriturismobeatilla.it/en/>), the price (5%) was also cited by the guests. By way of example, the breakfast is included in the price when booked in the accommodation official website, while there is add an extra fee when it is booked in the online booking platforms, such as: Booking.com, Tripadvisor.it, Hotel.com, Trip.com, FindHotel.com, eSky.pt and among many others.

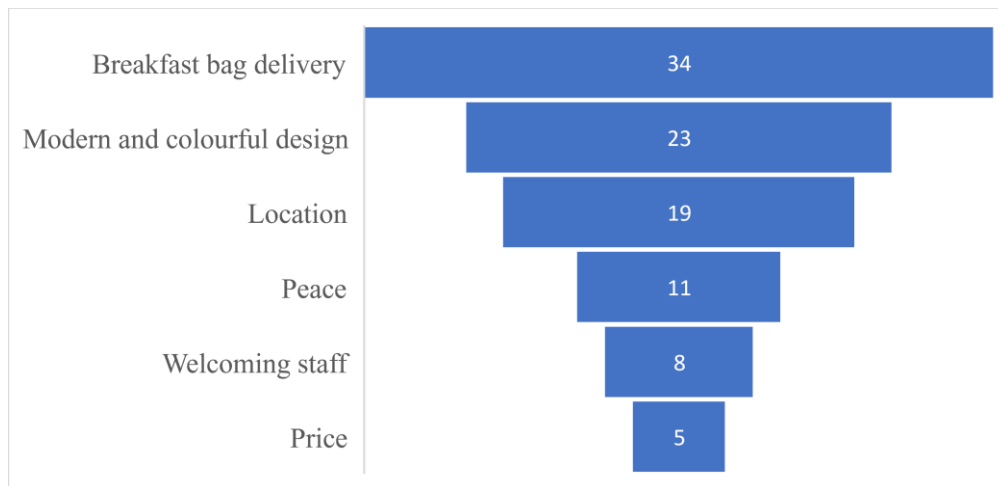


Figure 4.5. Surprising elements

Source: Self-elaboration (2022)

4.4. Main impacts of the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a severe impact in the overall hospitality industry, especially in the agritourism sector. Even if this subject has already been approached, it is also important to understand the guest's perspective and knowledge about the main impacts of the pandemic in *Agriturismo Beatilla*.

According to their answers, the interviewees showed a considerable knowledge in the matter and interest to help the agritourism business overcoming the pandemic negative consequences. As a result, the guests pointed out:

- Less guests,
- The decrease of the profit,
- No investment for the improvement of the accommodation, since that capital went to the disinfecting products,
- Suspension of some activities,
- Restructuring of the company's strategy,
- Unemployment.

Regarding the profit, the interviewees were also asked about this subject in their point of view and, in line with the answers given (table 4.1.), 69% failed the real loss percentage value. Anyhow, 30% mentioned the right range, which is between 30% to 50% and, according to the data provided by the company, the real percentage loss was 40%.

Table 4.1. Range of loss

%	Nº	%
0-10%	6	18
10%-30%	16	48
30-50%	10	30
50-70%	1	3
>70%	0	0
Total	33	100

Source: Self-elaboration (2022)

Moreover, a great percentage of individuals (18%) assumed that the *Agriturismo Beatilla* did not lost that much due to the government and European union support, and, for this reason, they consider a decrease of not more than 10%. On the contrary, 3% presumed a huge financial decrease between the 50% and 70%.

Nonetheless, the interviewed guests demonstrated being positive in regards the company's continued success and, after the question "Is *Agriturismo Beatilla* prepared and equipped to prevent the expansion of COVID-19?", 94% stated that the accommodation is perfectly prepared and 6% did not even notice or paid attention to it.

4.5. Recommendations to improve the accommodation

Taking in account the sentence "The customer is always right" and the importance given to the guests in order to satisfy their needs and desires, it is crucial to attend some of their recommendations with the main goal of improving any business. Then, the interviewees were encouraged to mention some recommendations or measures that could be applied to leverage the *Agriturismo Beatilla*.

In general, more tours and entertainment activities were the main suggestions made but, when being more specific, it was underlined:

- Nature therapeutic activities,
- Photography classes,
- Painting classes,
- Honey extraction, traditional Mantuan dishes and flower arranging workshops,
- Tree planting,
- Creation of a picnic area, kids' room, and fitness playground.

The implementation of the recommendations mentioned above would increase, without any doubt, the demand for this accommodation by virtue of the wider offer of services and activities.

In brief, *Agriturismo Beatilla* has already an advantageous location and safe anti-COVID 19 measures along with eco-friendly facilities and products that highlights the exceptional Luca's Bornoffi work then, the offer of a variety of activities would be vital to stand up this accommodation among many others.

5. THE FUTURE OF AGRITOURISM

Considering what was described in the chapters above, the future of the agritourism sector is a subject uncertain due to the restriction measures, constant changes, and financial situation of the families. Nevertheless, this uncertainty contributed to the agritourism evolution because of the implementation of new strategies and initiatives, in which were essential to survive in the market and mentioned in the subchapter 4.5.

Without disrespecting the security measures, the pandemic came to clarify five aspects for the continuous success of the sector in study, namely:

1. Services diversification:

Besides improving the existing offer in terms of facilities and services (e.g., Wi-Fi quality, hygienic protocol, sponsors and others), the companies concentrated their investment in the provision of new services and, in fact, “75% of the companies activated new business services, often not limited to just one service” (Finizia, A. et al., 2021, p. 60) to complete their offer and get more experience that may be used to improve the business.

2. Typical food and production:

There was a great interest not just for the seasonal and typical agricultural products and meals, the ways that they are produced also captivated the guest's attention. For this reason, the agritourism business expanded their offer related with food through workshops and visits to the fields and barns (where all the production happens).

3. Home-delivery and e-commerce:

With the lockdown, the home delivery emerged as an opportunity for both sides, companies, and clients. Since the circulation of individuals within the country was strictly controlled, there was a great demand for fresh and typical food and meals and, the delivery service provided by the companies was the perfect combo to get some income to the business.

E-commerce had an important role in the home-delivery service taking in account that most of the orders were made online, being a tool that will be used even more in the future.

4. Smart-working and long-stays:

Even after the worst periods of COVID-19 (especially in 2021), smart-working keeps being the way of working for several people. Consequently, the agritourism accommodations started to be more autonomous and improved their facilities (e.g., big outdoor spaces, better Wi-Fi connection, exclusive access to independent kitchens and among others) to satisfy the guests needs. Also, several incentives (e.g., special prices, free workshops, and activities) were added to this new trend to make them stay for a long period of time.

With that in mind, the families with kids and the remotely workers were the two main guests type for 2021.

5. Sustainable tourism:

As already mentioned before, the new touristic demand searches for sustainable, eco-friendly, and “green” accommodations, particularly after of the pandemic. Besides this, the “new tourist” desires big spaces to relax without worrying about possible contaminations and where the safety measures may be respected (Finizia et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, the study made by Finizia et al. (2021) for the National Rural Network Program 2014-2020 report confirms the increasing demand for the new services and proposals of 2021. This means that with the leverage of the restrictions there will be an increase of:

- 8.5 % in the direct sell of home-delivery products (28.9% in 2020 and 37.4% in 2021),

- 17 % in the long stays (16.2% in 2020 and 33.2% in 2021),
- 13.3 % in the spaces equipped for smart working (6.9% in 2020 and 20.2% in 2021),
- 5.7 % in e-commerce (9.6% in 2020 and 15.3% in 2021),
- 2.4 % administration of meals with home delivery (10.6% in 2020 and 13% in 2021),
- 2.7 % several types of activities for the local community (4.6% in 2020 and 7.3% in 2021),
- 0.2 % social activities for the individuals with less physical capacities (2.9% in 2020 and 3.1% in 2021),
- On contrary, there is a 1.5 % decrease of hospitality and activities for seniors (1.9% in 2020 and 0.4% in 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic damaged the entire tourist industry and, even if the agritourism sector suffered with that, it was the sector that saw the increase of its market share in terms of number of guests and overnight stays when putting together with other touristic structures (e.g., hotels, bed & breakfast, campsites, private lodgment, and others).

The pandemic caught the tourist's attention to the peaceful and relaxing countryside, especially within the Italians individuals due to the difficulty and, for some months prohibition of circulating between the countries. This means that the domestic demand, which was mostly European, predominated the arrivals during and after the pandemic. As a result, the touristic demand changed and new needs, desires and behaviors emerged, as:

- the demand ("the new tourist") became more exigent and cautions regarding the safety, sustainable and eco-friendly matters.
- And there are some that are more insecure and afraid, making them extremely rigorous and demanding.

Nevertheless, this sector turned out to be extremely resilient due to the domestic demand preference and initiatives applied to attract new guests. Also, the use of the three established cornerstones (innovation, sustainability, and digitalism) combined will develop and progress even more this sector with the effort of not losing the authenticity of the farm.

In terms of the internship made, the *Agriturismo Beatilla* was the chosen accommodation to accomplish the goals established in the present report and for that, it was realized informal interviews to understand the impact in a real business and the perspective of the guests. In fact, the impacts matched with the ones described in the literature review (e.g., less arrivals and overnight stays; more Italian guests than foreigners) and it was presented some recommendations to improve the business, which may be applied in others also.

6.1. Limitations and recommendations for future developments of the work

The lack of were the two main limitations of the report. At first, the study of the pandemic impacts in the sector of agritourism is so recent that it is not easy to find too many reports and data about it, particularly in the year of 2021. At second, the *Agriturismo Beatilla* did not provide information about the specific financial situation of the business, which was important to enrich the present report. Even so, it was easily given all other kind of data when requested.

Finally, there are some topics that may be aborded due to the lack of it, such as:

- The impact of the COVID-19 in the financial performance of the agritourism companies,
- The future of agritourism, considering the technological advances without losing the authenticity,
- Understand the guests' preferences even with the end of the pandemic,
- Research about the agritourism in Portugal and realize the missing elements to grow up in the touristic market.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview questions

Part I – Personal data

1. Nationality
2. Age
3. Occupation:
 - (i) Employed,
 - (ii) Unemployed,
 - (iii) Retired,
 - (iv) Student.
4. Motive of travel:
 - (i) Leisure,
 - (ii) Work.

Part II – Agritourism and COVID-19

5. Are you a repeater? And, if yes, which were the main reasons to come back?
6. Main motivations to choose an agritourism accommodation after COVID-19?
 - (i) Price,
 - (ii) Isolation and safety,
 - (iii) Nature activities,
 - (iv) Healthy lifestyle,
 - (v) Peacefulness, quietness, and relaxing moments,
 - (vi) COVID-19 did not have any influence.
7. Main motivations for choosing *Agriturismo Beatilla*?
 - (i) Location, near the *Mântua* city,
 - (ii) Or the location due to the cycling path,
 - (ii) Attractive price,
 - (iii) Modern and colorful design,

- (iv) Sustainable and eco-friendly accommodation,
- (v) Positive reviews.

8. Which elements surprise you the most in *Agriturismo Beatilla*?

- (i) Breakfast bag delivery,
- (ii) Price,
- (iii) Peace,
- (iv) Welcoming staff,
- (v) Modern and colorful design,
- (vi) Location.

9. In your opinion, what were the COVID-19 impacts in the *Agriturismo Beatilla*?

- (i) Less guests,
- (ii) Unemployment,
- (iii) Profit decrease,
- (iv) No investment for the accommodation improvement,
- (v) Suspension of some activities,
- (vi) Company's strategy restructuring.

10. Can you guess the loss percentage value?

- (i) 0 - 10 %,
- (ii) 10 % - 30 %,
- (iii) 30 % - 50 %,
- (iv) 50 % - 70 %,
- (v) > 70 %.

11. Is *Agriturismo Beatilla* prepared and equipped to prevent the expansion of COVID-19?

- (i) Perfectly prepared and equipped,
- (ii) Did not notice or paid attention.

12. Do you have any recommendation to improve the accommodation in study?