



Agritourism from the perspective of providers and visitors: a typology-based study



Sharon Flanigan^{a,*,1}, Kirsty Blackstock^a, Colin Hunter^b

^a Social, Economic & Geographical Sciences, The James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen, AB15 8QH, United Kingdom

^b Department of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews, Irvine Building, St Andrews, KY16 9AL, United Kingdom

H I G H L I G H T S

- This paper investigates providers and visitors perceptions of 'agritourism'.
- An existing literature-based typology is developed with empirical perspectives.
- Interaction, a working farm and authenticity underpin our revised typology.
- Further research can utilise the 'typology-based approach' adopted in this study.

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A B S T R A C T

In recent decades, international studies have improved understanding of how agritourism is practiced. However, studies are founded on a range of definitions based on different combinations of key characteristics, which have been synthesised in our recent typology (Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010). The typology provides a foundation for this study, which further develops conceptual understanding of agritourism by integrating empirical understandings of agritourism with the original typology, which was based on the literature. Our revised typology presented here incorporates three discriminating characteristics, which are fundamentally consistent with the original version: the nature of interaction between visitors and agriculture; whether the product is based on a working farm; and whether the visitor experiences authentic working agriculture. This paper makes two important contributions to the agritourism literature: 1) it integrates stakeholder perspectives to the agritourism literature; and 2) it exemplifies and examines one way that the typology can be used to underpin further agritourism research.

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1. Introduction

The concept of agritourism has been discussed in a variety of ways in the international literature relating to tourism and rural development. However, limited attention has been given to understanding the key features that define agritourism as a concept. This suggests a vital step has been missed in the systematic study of agritourism in practice, despite the importance of the link between theory and practice being recognised two decades ago (Evans & Ilbery, 1992). Studies continue to apply wide-ranging definitions of agritourism resulting in a 'complex and confusing picture' (Phillip et al. 2010). In our earlier paper, a

proposed 'agritourism typology' identifies key characteristics of agritourism² for the first time (a working farm; contact with agricultural activity; authenticity of tourists agricultural experience) and applies them in a systematic way to demonstrate a series of agritourism 'types' that incorporate the wide range of products discussed across the literature (Phillip et al., 2010) (see Fig. 1). The agritourism typology makes a significant contribution to the literature by providing an effective structure for differentiating between agritourism products. This allows authors to position their work in a meaningful way (e.g. Gillespie, 2011) and provides a coherent starting point for further

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 0 1224 395307; fax: +44 0 844 928 5429.

E-mail address: sharon.flanigan@hutton.ac.uk (S. Flanigan).

¹ Nee Phillip.

² To clarify, we use the term agritourism to signify the range of related labels (e.g. farm tourism, farm-based tourism, agrotourism) used across the literature as a whole and reiterate the argument that agritourism is a specific subset of rural tourism (Clarke, 1999; Nilsson, 2002; Phillip et al., 2010).

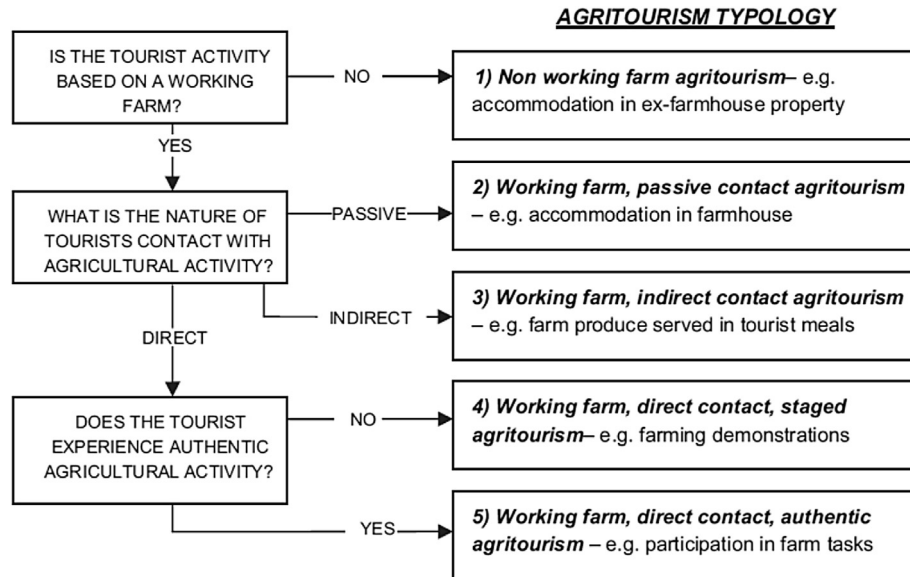


Fig. 1. A typology for defining agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010).

study to improve understanding of agritourism as a concept and practice.

However, our original typology did not include input from key stakeholders involved in the everyday practice of agritourism. This input is fundamentally important in order to ensure that “*ordinary, everyday common sense consciousness [is at the] centre of social theory*” (Turner & Rojek, 2001:150). The research presented in this paper is based on a case study, which investigates how agritourism is understood by those directly involved, i.e. providers (including farmers, farm families, and off-farm suppliers of agritourism products) and visitors (including local and tourist markets). Consideration of both supply and demand-side perspectives is an important feature of this study for a number of reasons. First, a key principle underlying all tourism is the inseparability of production from consumption, which means visitors co-produce tourism products at the time of consumption (Cooper & Hall, 2008; Smith, 1994; Swarbrooke, 2002). Second, the agritourism literature is dominated by studies that focus on aspects of agritourism supply (e.g. Bowler et al., 1996; Evans & Ilbery, 1992; Forbord, Schermer, & Griebmair, 2012; Ilbery, Bowler, Clark, Crockett, & Shaw, 1998; McGehee, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004; McGehee, Kim, & Jennings, 2007; Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Sharpley & Vass, 2006; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Demand-side perspectives are more limited in the literature (see Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Pearce, 1990 for examples). However, there were no published studies of agritourism from both supply and demand-perspectives when this study was carried out.

The primary objective of this paper is to address the gap in the literature described above, by investigating the perspectives of agritourism providers and visitors in twenty-five locations across Scotland. These perspectives allowed us to make revisions to the original agritourism typology, thus illustrating how it can provide a “*more solid foundation for future empirical research*” (Phillip et al., 2010:757). An additional objective is to consider the wider implications of using the agritourism typology as a tool to facilitate agritourism research. The paper therefore illustrates how the agritourism typology can be utilised in empirical research and how such an approach can contribute to the debates in the literature. Following a brief literature review, the methodology section includes details of how the typology-based approach was applied in

this study. Subsequently, the results sections discuss our revisions to the typology and participant perceptions of its three key discriminators, which are fundamentally consistent with those in the original typology. Finally, the implications of this study are discussed, conclusions are presented and suggestions for further agritourism research building on the agritourism typology-based approach are made.

2. Literature review

Over the past two decades, agritourism has been discussed in a variety of contexts in the international literature. Within this literature a variety of definitions have been used, which has resulted in a somewhat chaotic picture in terms of a basic conceptual understanding of what agritourism entails. Because agritourism lies at the nexus of several bodies of literature, the relative emphasis of definitions often corresponds with the topic being studied. For example, the implications of farm diversification are often reflected in the literature relating to agriculture and rural development (e.g. Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Ilbery et al., 1998), whereas the importance of visitor experience is more often reflected in the tourism literature (e.g. Clarke, 1999; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Although these are logical distinctions, it was this emphasis on different characteristics of agritourism that prompted us to develop a conceptual typology for defining agritourism (Phillip et al., 2010).

Our original agritourism typology identified three key debates that relate to the ways that agritourism has been defined. These are: 1) whether or not the product is based on a working farm; 2) the nature of contact that visitors have with agriculture; and 3) the authenticity of visitors' agricultural experience (Phillip et al., 2010). In the context of the first of these three debates, a working farm was the most frequently cited requirement of agritourism in the literature (e.g. Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Clarke, 1999; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Ollenburg, 2006; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Wall, 2000; Weaver & Fennell, 1997). However, studies where a working farm is not required were also identified (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Jaworski & Lawson, 2005). In the second debate, the tangibility of agriculture in the context of visitor experiences of agritourism is discussed. Distinctions are drawn between: agritourism products such as farm accommodation and activity products that are simply

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