



Theoretical Conceptions of the Territorial Approach in Sustainable and Resilient Rural Tourism Planning

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ABSTRACT

Territorial development, which entails the utilization of endogenous resources, is regarded as a relatively new approach based on enhancing the competitiveness of local productive and institutional systems through multidimensional, multifunctional, and regionally diverse principles. In recent years, rural tourism has become one of the strategies adopted to promote, develop, and integrate local factors through the territorial approach. This approach has not only contributed to the achievement of development objectives but has also enhanced the resilience of rural communities. Accordingly, the United Nations has declared 2027 the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism. This article examines recent trends and advances in rural tourism development as a strategic action informed by the territorial approach at the local scale. The study shows that rural areas whose natural, social, and economic foundations are dependent on tourism need to adopt a territorial approach in order to achieve sustainable development and resilience. Within this framework, the territorial approach has contributed to identifying and prioritizing the most urgent local challenges in the field of rural tourism. It has also provided more sustainable and resilient solutions for villages with tourism potential. Thus, by explaining the theoretical conceptions of the territorial approach, this article contributes to strengthening the foundations of territorial science in sustainable and resilient rural tourism planning.

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Introduction

The twentieth century ended in a context where earlier rural development strategies had not been able to adequately respond to persistent issues such as poverty, employment, health, food security, and environmental sustainability. As a result, rural development continued to be confronted with multiple problems and structural challenges. The persistence and breadth of these challenges have made it necessary to examine alternative approaches to rural development across different dimensions, particularly approaches that may offer stronger prospects for success. One such alternative is the territorial approach to rural development (Khodadadi et al., 2022: 223). Territorial development, as an emerging and multidimensional concept, opens a space for rethinking development alternatives and solutions in both rural and urban spaces. It refers to a form of development that seeks to avoid ecosystem degradation and the expansion of social inequalities (Frigo Denardin, 2022: 39). The territorial approach appears to be more effective and sustainable when it is aligned with local socio-economic and ecological conditions (Forster et al., 2021: 13).

On this basis, rural development policies have experienced significant transformations in recent years and have increasingly been framed through sustainable development and territorial perspectives. The lack of a holistic perspective in policymaking seems to have caused different rural sectors to function in a fragmented and isolated manner, while the principle of complementarity among places within the territorial approach has received insufficient attention (Badri et al., 2019: 5). Under these conditions, spatial organization requires the careful and rational use of territories according to their capacities and capabilities, while also ensuring coordination with other regions (Pourtaheri et al., 2022: 72).

Within this context, rural tourism, as one of the rapidly expanding sectors of the contemporary economy, is facing unprecedented levels of competition. At the same time, because tourism attractiveness often depends on the natural and cultural endowments of territories, the sustainable use of these resources at territorial scales has become increasingly important within this competitive environment (Romao et al., 2017: 1). The territorial approach to tourism highlights the distinctive natural and economic characteristics of each territory and enables local citizens to use their surrounding environment in a more sustainable way (Filippo and Daniele, 2025: 1–3).

In the increasingly competitive landscape of contemporary tourism, this approach supports the protection, conservation, and sustainable use of local heritage. Territorial identity represents a central element in tourism development and should be mobilized because it provides a foundation for innovative proposals and for building competitive advantage in the market. A tourism region is formed through the combination of natural, anthropological, economic, social, and cultural elements. Together, these elements create the arena in which economic activities expand and may either strengthen or weaken the territorial fabric. In this regard, people and their territory are positioned at the core of the system, jointly expressing territorial identity and a distinctive image of place. Tourism therefore represents an important opportunity for territorial redevelopment, economic prospects, and employment generation. For this reason, the United Nations has declared 2027 the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism. Accordingly, social, territorial, and economic cohesion provides the

organizing basis for tourism models that effectively bring together identity, sustainability, and resilience (Calabrò and Gambino, 2025: 1).

From the perspective of spatial and regional planning, sustainable and resilient development and growth are among the principal concerns and objectives of territories. This is particularly significant for territories whose social and economic foundations are closely linked to tourism, since spatial and regional planning policies may have stronger effects in such areas than in territories whose socio-economic base is not primarily tourism-dependent. Therefore, studies that clarify territorial planning and its relationship with tourism activities are essential for strengthening the sustainable development and resilience of these areas (Castanho et al., 2020: 1–2). Accordingly, defining the territorial area and understanding its effects are necessary for implementing tourism strategies, because neglecting the relevant challenges and opportunities can undermine the successful execution of such strategies (Pertoldi, 2022: 44).

Accordingly, the main research question is formulated as follows: from a theoretical perspective, what meaning and position does the territorial approach have in rural tourism, and what effects can it produce for rural tourism development? The present study therefore addresses a critical gap in the theoretical literature and seeks, through an in-depth examination, to contribute to filling this conceptual gap. In this regard, the article emphasizes rural tourism as a form of sustainable tourism that can support the rediscovery and valorization of territories across different spatial dimensions. It also highlights the need to revitalize territories with rural tourism potential through the territorial approach in order to achieve the objectives of sustainable and resilient rural tourism.

Methodology

The present study is theoretical and review-based in nature. In this study, the researcher examines and explains the phenomenon of rural tourism based on scientific documents and evidence by drawing on existing theories, concepts, and models. This type of research is grounded in existing theoretical knowledge and findings and seeks to provide a deeper understanding, theoretical development, and new explanations through a critical approach. Accordingly, it provides a basis for developing the theoretical conceptions of the territorial approach in the planning and development of sustainable and resilient rural tourism and subjects this approach to critical examination and evaluation.

Theoretical Foundations

Territory can be understood as the fundamental setting within which human productive and social activities are organized. It is the space where population is distributed, agriculture develops, industry emerges, and biological as well as social human actions and interactions acquire meaning and identity (Khodadadi et al., 2023: 27). Territory may also be conceptualized as a component of geographical space, whose meaning is shaped through its relationship with space itself (Elden, 2010: 799). Walter Isard, known as the father of regional science, illustrated the connection between human beings and territory through the metaphor of an astronaut returning from space and descending toward Earth. In his view, as the spacecraft comes closer to the planet's

surface, landscapes become visible in increasingly finer detail. This metaphor suggests a movement across different spatial and economic scales, from macro-level systems to the processes of territorial development. Ultimately, before landing, the astronaut is able to observe the everyday activities of populations, as well as the movement of actors and the networks through which they are connected (Torre, 2023: 1–3).

It appears that numerous definitions of territory have so far been proposed depending on the type of scientific discipline. From the perspective of G. Dematteis, as a geographer, territories represent material realities and environments shaped by social, economic, political, and cultural forces. They include a set of interconnected networks, ecosystems, and identities. From this viewpoint, territories are realities formed in space which, through the actions of actors within networks and nodes, are produced as multidimensional territorial systems with distinct domains (Aurelio Saquet, 2016: 8). From the perspective of political geography, territories can be considered political spaces; spaces with defined boundaries that are closely associated with identity and can be used to induce and reproduce a sense of loyalty, attachment, and belonging (Storey, 2018: 34). From this viewpoint, territory is subject to the analysis of the perceptions and representations of all actors involved in power competition within a specific area (Bailon, 2021: 1).

Within interdisciplinary discourse, the concept of territory becomes closely connected with elements such as space, political institutions, strategy, place, boundaries, and networks (Mazzoleni, 2024: 23). The concept of territory takes on different meanings depending on disciplinary perspectives. However, most of these meanings derive from the spatial dimension or geographical space as used by geographers. From this perspective, territory is defined as a geographical space that is distinguished from other places within a country on the basis of administrative affiliations or the existence of specific natural or cultural spaces (Salah, 2022: 126).

Nevertheless, defining the territorial approach remains a complex task. This complexity arises because the approach usually combines bottom-up and top-down dynamics, while its formation takes place through an ongoing and long-term process. In this respect, territorial integration is regarded as one of the central dimensions in the conceptualization of territory (Pertoldi, 2022: 44). Based on the definitions discussed above, it can be argued that the traditional understanding of territory has mainly emphasized boundaries, identity, integration, sovereignty, and spatial cohesion. However, contemporary interpretations of territory have expanded this focus to include institutions, political economy, governance, politics, and culture (Khodadadi and Pourtaheri, 2022: 40).

Accordingly, the territorial approach can be understood as a mode of development that is endogenous, spatially integrated, and dependent on the participation of actors operating across multiple scales, while also creating added value for national development (EU, 2024: 1). In much of the literature, territorial development is described as a process through which the productive, social, and institutional structures of a territory are transformed simultaneously, with the aim of reducing poverty in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals. From this perspective, territorial development is viewed as the uncertain and context-dependent outcome of interactions among geographical spaces across economic, political, scientific and technological,

social and cultural, natural, institutional, and spatial dimensions (Aranda et al., 2009: 131).

Therefore, sustainable and balanced territorial development, when pursued through the territorial approach, should be seen as a form of management and planning grounded in social, cultural, and natural values (Linares Gómez del Pulgar et al., 2024: 1). In this sense, approaches concerned with the territorial dimension may be interpreted as a paradigmatic lens for studies that seek innovative ways of thinking and that emphasize multidisciplinary and multidimensional perspectives.

On this basis, the core principles of territorial approaches, which may also be used as criteria for assessing rural tourism development strategies, include being place-based, people-centred, rights-based, cross-sectoral, multi-actor, and multi-level (Forster et al., 2021: 13). These common principles can contribute to stronger territorial cohesion and more integrated forms of territorial governance. In turn, territorial cohesion and integrated territorial governance enable more inclusive actions by allowing diverse levels, actors, and spaces to contribute to sustainable development and resilience.

A review of the development literature shows that the territorial approach has been employed across a wide range of fields. Among these, tourism planning and development represent one of the most important areas in which this approach has been applied. As illustrated in Figure 1, the literature on territory and tourism planning shows that the concept of territory has been used in tourism studies through the following major themes.

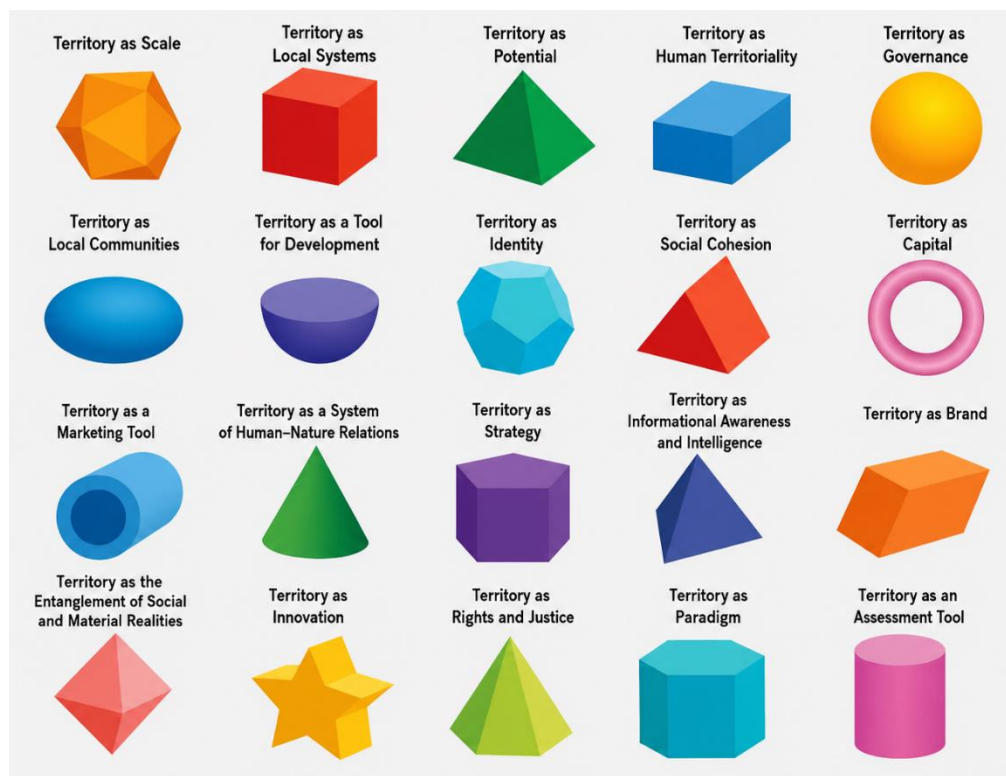


Figure 1. The Most Important Themes and Applied Concepts of Territory in the Field of Tourism

- Territory as a scale or territorial scale for planning in the field of territorial tourism through the provision of a network of infrastructure and tourism axes (Nunez-Torres et al., 2023: 1).
- Territory as local territorial systems for sustainable tourism development through the provision of appropriate regional proposals aimed at creating integrated and cohesive territorial systems (Irene Prete et al., 2025: 1).
- Territory as a tool for assessing the territorial impacts of tourism activities in the fields of environmental and spatial planning, society, economy, and territorial governance (Stubičar and Marot, 2025: 1).
- Territory as a potential for tourism development through the utilization of natural and cultural tourism services and attractions with ecotourism potential (Mateos et al., 2025: 43).
- Territory as a model of human territoriality that influences tourists' experiences in tourism spaces (Andereck, 1997: 706).
- Territory as local communities for the development of the local tourism economy and as a factor contributing to economic growth, the creation of new jobs, and an increase in the level of investment (Pavliuk et al., 2025: 1).
- Territory as a tool for territorial development through the utilization of existing resources and potentials in tourism destinations (Casado et al., 2025: 188).
- Territory as identity or territorial identity, based on the creation and strengthening of national attachment through the synergistic relationship between tourism and territorial identity (Happ and Nemes, 2025: 255).
- Territory as territorial governance, providing a model for tourism management based on the coordinated and cohesive participation of local actors within the framework of shared stakeholder legitimacy (Almeida et al., 2024: 58).
- Territory as an arena of social and territorial cohesion, based on the development of cultural tourism through stakeholder cooperation and participation and the connection of local communities with their cultural heritage (Coppin and Guichard, 2024: 7).
- Territory as capital, referred to as territorial capital, in interaction with tourism as a place-based and knowledge-based activity through the facilitation of regional growth processes (Romão, 2018: 1).
- Territory as a marketing tool, or territorial marketing, as a means of strengthening territorial brands and utilizing the competitive advantages of tourism destinations (Rodrigues et al., 2024: 197).
- Territory as a system of human–nature relations within the framework of human activities in specific geographical environments, aimed at promoting the sustainable development of regional tourism systems (Ling et al., 2024: 1219).
- Territory as a strategy or territorial strategy for achieving the objectives of sustainable and balanced territorial development based on cultural and natural values in tourism destinations (Linares Gómez et al., 2024: 1).
- Territory as information awareness and intelligence, or territorial intelligence, through the achievement of sustainable tourism development objectives based on the use of technology and innovation (Cornejo-Ortega et al., 2024: 1447).

- Territory as a brand or territorial brand, involving initiatives in the fields of innovation, entrepreneurship, and the promotion of specific and unique tourism-related events (Teixeira Costa et al., 2020: 279).

- The concept of territory as the entanglement of material and social realities within the framework of territorial identity in tourism destinations characterized by cohesive social and material structures (Holubec, 2016: 205).

- The concept of territory as territorial innovation, focusing on technological, organizational, social, and institutional innovation in tourism destinations (Torre, 2023: 1–3).

- The concept of territory as territorial rights and territorial justice, derived from political philosophy and territorial justice theory, with an equity-oriented approach to the allocation of tourism resources (Moore, 2024: 2).

- Territory as a paradigm for territorial tourism development through the creation of identity and the strengthening of future opportunities by offering a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable tourism model .

Finally, territory is also conceptualized as an approach, referred to as the territorial approach, which has been emphasized across various fields of tourism within the framework of sustainable and resilient development objectives (OECD, 2020: 23). Such an approach is based on recognizing the new role that must be provided in order to address the challenges of economic and social development at the local level. Therefore, in modern planning, territory is no longer merely a geographical substrate; rather, it is a strategic asset. The diversity of these concepts indicates that, for rural tourism to succeed, material dimensions such as infrastructure, social dimensions such as identity and local community, and institutional dimensions such as governance and justice must be addressed simultaneously. In interaction with the principles of the territorial approach, it is also possible to refer to certain characteristics and attributes that can provide the basis for tourism development in general and rural tourism development in particular. As Figure 2 illustrates, these characteristics and attributes may be understood through the lens of the territorial approach.

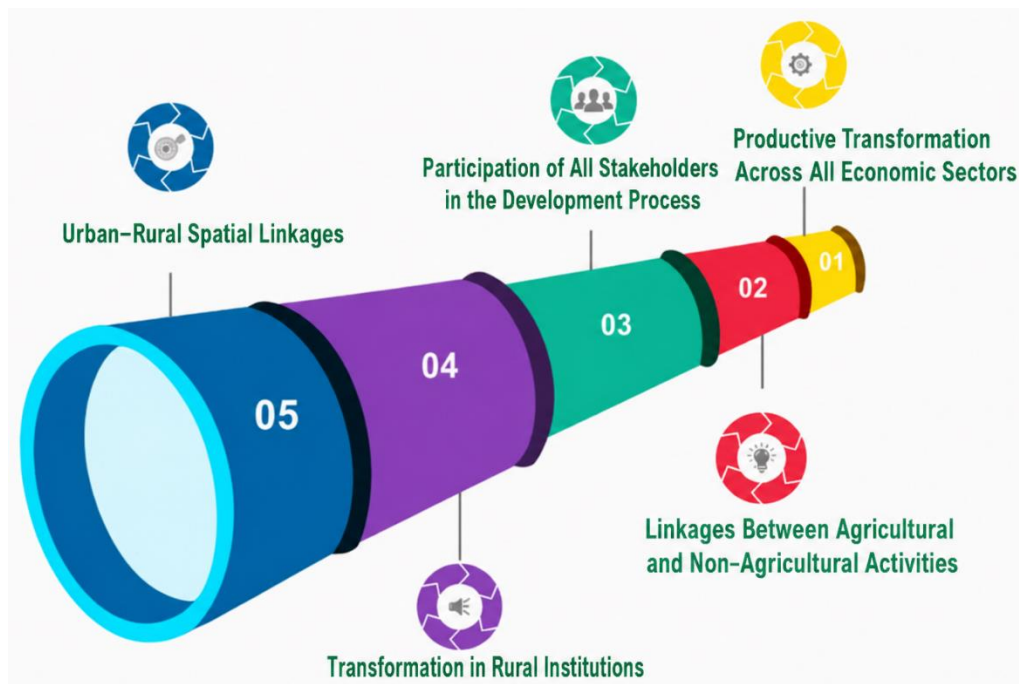


Figure 2. The Lens of the Characteristics and Attributes of the Territorial Approach to Rural Tourism

- The first attribute is that the proposed territorial approach extends beyond the agricultural sector and is based on productive transformation across all economic sectors, including rural tourism.
- Second, rather than focusing actions exclusively on poor rural households, this approach emphasizes the necessity of involving all stakeholders in the rural development process, particularly in the sustainable development of rural tourism.
- Third, it involves linking agricultural and non-agricultural activities, including rural tourism, within supply chains.
- Fourth, it has a spatial structure based on deepening urban–rural linkages through the formation of networks, including both vertical and horizontal networks. Within this network structure, horizontal and vertical linkages between rural tourism destination villages, surrounding villages, and cities are emphasized through the formation of territorial clusters and supply chains.
- The fifth characteristic is the increasing importance assigned to rural institutions, including institutions related to tourism.

On this basis, rural development should not rely solely on agriculture. Rather, new supply chains should be created through tourism, linking cities and villages within territorial groups or clusters. Within such a structure, important criteria are manifested in the territorial approach, which influence the process of rural planning and development in general and rural tourism development in particular. These criteria are interpreted through an ocular lens, as shown in Figure 3, as follows.

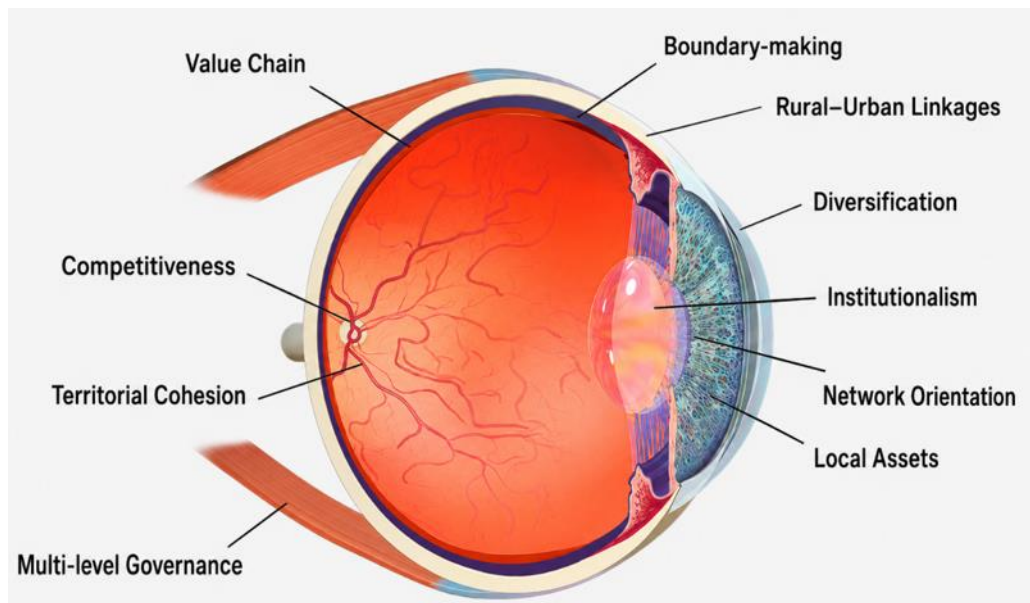


Figure 3. Criteria Explaining the Analytical Lens of the Territorial Approach to Rural Tourism

- **Boundary-making**, which emphasizes delimitation, identity, integration, sovereignty, spatial cohesion, political economy, culture, and the integrated governance of tourism regions.

- **Rural-urban linkages**, which are materialized through the continuous flow of people, capital, goods, information, and technology between rural and urban areas, particularly tourism destinations.

- **Diversification**, which is emphasized as the foundation of stability and sustainability in tourism regions. It is based on the premise that the more diversified a system becomes, the more its sustainability and dynamism can be maintained over time and across different places, not only in response to internal stresses but also in the face of external pressures.

- **The formation of local institutions**, which are regarded as partners in achieving sustainable tourism development.

- **Network orientation**, which is capable of connecting a group of tourism regions through vertical and horizontal networks, thereby enabling extensive interactions aimed at achieving shared benefits.

- **A focus on the existing assets of tourism regions**, including human, social-institutional, natural, financial, and physical assets, based on an endogenous development strategy that is largely dependent on a set of local resources.

- **Value-chain provision**, which refers to the configuration of roles and the redefinition of activities and relationships among value-creating actors. This can generate strategic competitive advantages in tourism regions.

- **Competitiveness**, which, as an advantage over other regions, combines the attractions and economic, managerial, political, historical, and cultural dimensions of tourism regions.

- **Territorial cohesion**, which refers to agreement on objectives, values, and attitudes at the level of tourism regions and is the product of rational and voluntary action. Territorial cohesion is pursued with the aim of balanced development, reducing

inequalities, creating equal opportunities, and strengthening solidarity and cooperation within and between tourism regions.

• **Attention to the multi-level system of territorial governance**, which is pursued with the aim of coordination and networking in tourism regions.

These characteristics suggest that system sustainability is closely linked to diversification and network formation. A more diversified system is generally better equipped to withstand external pressures and maintain its functional continuity. In addition, the emphasis placed on existing territorial assets reflects a shift away from externally driven development models toward more endogenous forms of development.

From a paradigmatic standpoint, the territorial approach in tourism also requires an assessment of how far policies and regulations, when embedded in territorial development plans and programmes, can support the realization of sustainable development and resilience objectives in rural tourism regions (Marot and Stubičar, 2025: 2). As discussed earlier, the territorial approach contains several defining features that may shape sustainable tourism development broadly and rural tourism development more specifically.

The territorial approach has developed in a way that enables it to pursue two principal objectives. First, it allows regions and places to use their capacities more fully in order to strengthen competitiveness or improve efficiency. Second, it seeks to improve living conditions for all places and populations by advancing spatial justice and equality across different geographical levels.

The territorial approach contributes to the formation of territorial identity and is grounded in the relative homogeneity of cultural and social spaces, where individuals share a collective sense of belonging and where similarity and solidarity among members can be observed. This concept is an important part of the value system of tourism. Territorial identity has a crucial role in sustainable and resilient tourism development, since it is among the key elements through which territorial branding is constructed and destination image is shaped. However, it should be emphasized that an initial perception of a particular space does not automatically produce territorial identity. A related and equally important concept in tourism is competitiveness, within which the image of territory is a core component and is strongly shaped by the territorial identity of local residents (Happ, 2025: 226).

These characteristics make it possible to establish a coherent relationship between the territorial approach, development sustainability, and resilience, particularly in tourism contexts. Accordingly, among the different dimensions of sustainability, territorial sustainability has emerged as a complementary concept, especially in discussions of local economic development and rural tourism. This concept gives particular attention to territorial dimensions, including the efficient and appropriate use of geographical space.

A comprehensive understanding of sustainability from a territorial perspective should incorporate key geographical concepts such as territory, space, place, spatial differentiation, and scale. Territorial sustainability depends on the interaction between physical and digital infrastructure and softer, less tangible elements such as environmental quality, spatial mobility, cultural heritage, tourism attractions, and

commercial capacity. Through this interaction, territories become better positioned to respond to current challenges and to sustain development over the long term.

At the same time, important logical and conceptual links can be recognized between resilience and tourism sustainability. If resilience is understood as the capacity of a system to absorb change while preserving continuity, sustainability can be viewed as the point at which social, economic, institutional, and environmental variables intersect. In this sense, resilience refers to the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance, learn from disruption, and adapt during periods of turbulence in order to enhance growth and dynamism. Sustainability, by contrast, is commonly associated with the capacity of a system to maintain adaptive potential and support opportunities and innovation. The combination of adaptability and innovation increases the ability of tourism systems to absorb internal shocks, such as social inequality and political instability, as well as external shocks, including economic change and environmental hazards (Holladay, 2018: 252).

On this basis, resilience theories remain highly relevant to tourism studies. Tourism regions can be interpreted as complex systems with considerable adaptive potential, since they are constantly required to respond to endogenous and exogenous shocks and stresses that influence their development trajectories as well as the actors and agents operating within these systems (Hartman, 2018: 6).

Because tourism activities are distributed across a wide variety of places, they can support the spatial dispersion of economic activity, particularly in rural areas. Although tourism may strengthen local economies, excessive reliance on this sector can also deepen vulnerability and make tourism destinations more exposed to crisis-induced change and disruption, as was clearly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourism should also be understood as an interdisciplinary phenomenon, within which resilience is interpreted through the framework of sustainable tourism and in relation to the principles of the territorial approach. Rural tourism, in particular, should be viewed as an open system: on the one hand, it is exposed to external forces such as natural hazards, economic recession, pandemics, and political conflicts; on the other hand, it continuously affects the environment in which it operates. Therefore, from the standpoint of the territorial approach, resilience is a necessary condition for tourism sustainability (Vasvári, 2025: 31).

Accordingly, territorial sustainability and resilience can be considered among the central pillars of the territorial approach. They do not imply the analysis of a single system in isolation; rather, they require examining that system through its continuous interaction with other systems and subsystems. This interpretation indicates a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of rural tourism through the territorial approach (Filippo and Daniele, 2025: 1–3).

Within this process, emphasis is placed on principles such as green transition, digital transformation, sustainable and smart growth, social and territorial cohesion, and socio-economic resilience. These principles also include strengthening crisis response and preparedness, together with targeted educational and skills policies for future generations. In line with these principles, the territorial approach can be proposed as a theoretical framework with practical relevance for rural tourism planning and development (Echave, 2022: 8). On this basis, as shown in Figure 4, sustainable and

resilient tourism and the territorial approach can be understood as closely interconnected through their shared elements tourism and the territorial approach are closely interconnected through their shared elements.

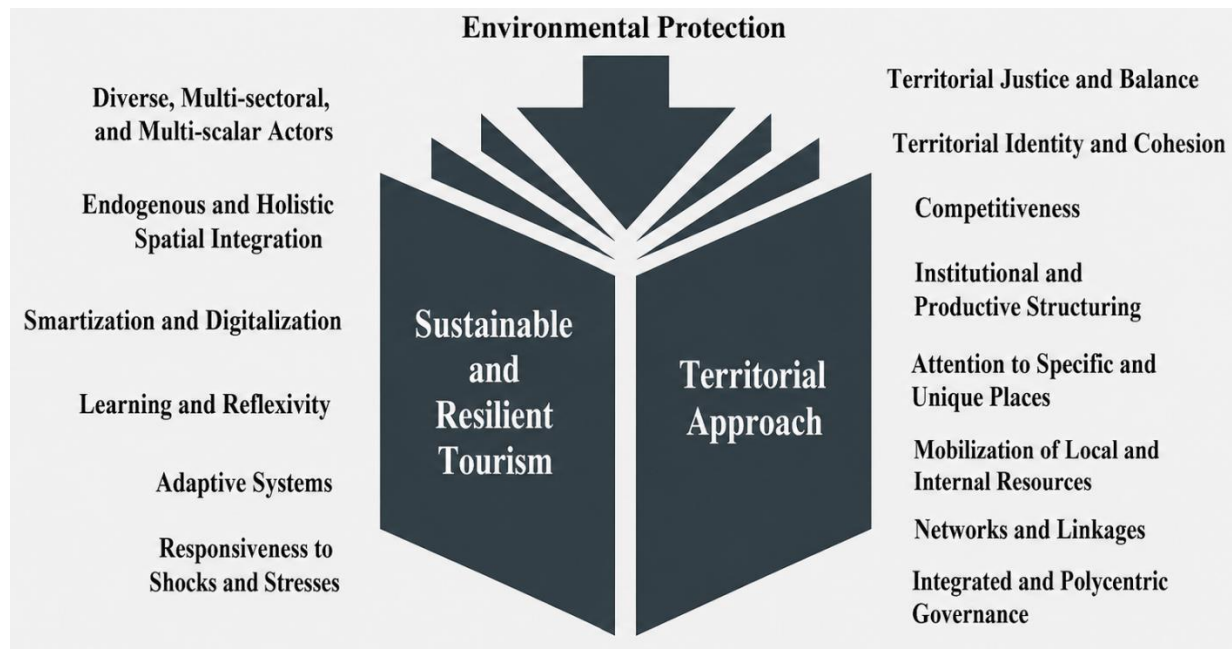


Figure 4. Explaining the Relationships between the Territorial Approach and Sustainable and Resilient Tourism

This model suggests that resilience, understood as the capacity to absorb shocks, and sustainability, understood as the capacity for long-term adaptation, are two sides of the same coin, connected through the territorial approach. Within this structure, rural tourism is regarded as an open system that must protect itself against disruptions such as pandemics or economic crises through the use of smart tools and resource management.

Results and Discussion

The findings suggest that applying a territorial approach is a fundamental requirement for planning and developing rural tourism destinations that are both sustainable and resilient. From this perspective, environmental protection and resource management constitute the main area of intersection between sustainable rural tourism and resilient rural tourism. Tourism regions need to be protected as a planning priority because they are particularly exposed to abrupt climatic variations and external shocks. In this context, the development of infrastructure, the expansion of digitalization, the reduction of bureaucratic constraints, the improvement of transportation systems, and the strengthening of territorial image are also necessary. Achieving these objectives requires a coherent strategy and a medium- to long-term vision grounded in the territorial approach.

Sustainable and resilient tourism can be understood as an economy shaped by mobility and spatial relations, through which experiences, meanings, value, and wealth are produced while environmental quality, natural resources, and cultural heritage in local territories are respected. Moreover, this form of tourism communicates a developmental

message: destinations can become attractive without causing environmental degradation, and such attractiveness can contribute to territorial sustainability. These messages provide strategic guidance for incorporating the territorial approach into the planning and development of sustainable and resilient tourism. Accordingly, as illustrated in Figure 5, embedding territorial diagnosis within the planning process should be regarded as one of the key executive requirements.

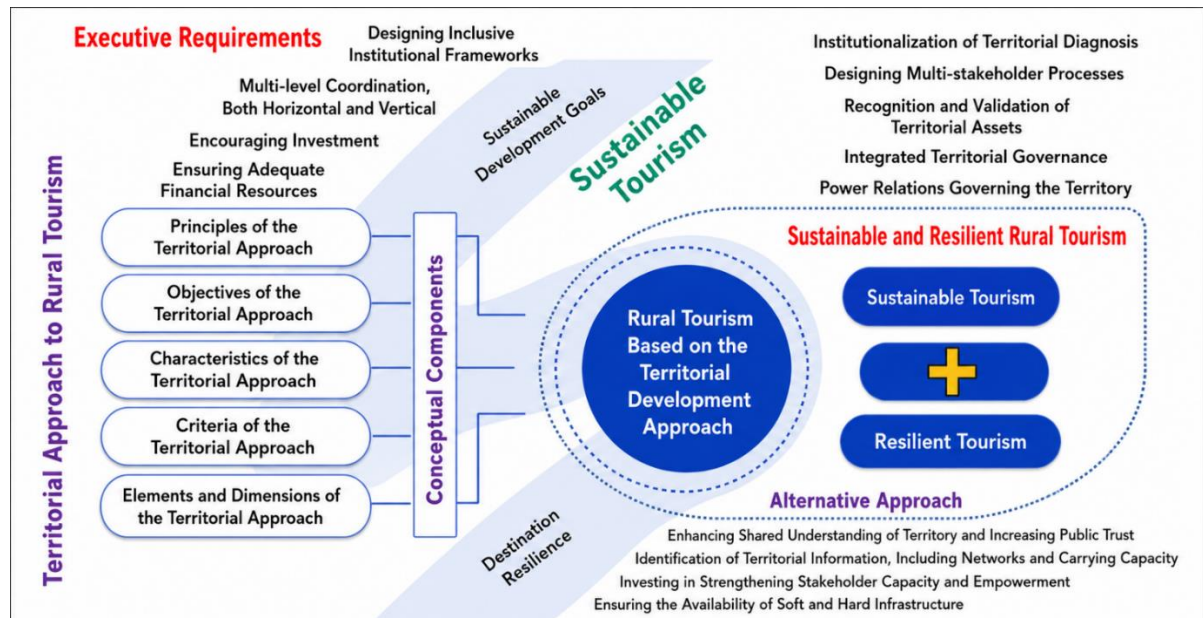


Figure 5. The Conceptual and Functional Linkage between Rural Tourism Sustainability and Resilience through the Territorial Development Approach

Designing multi-stakeholder processes to provide territorial assessments by promoting a shared understanding of territory and increasing public trust is of considerable importance. This also includes the recognition and validation of territorial assets, including human, material, economic, financial, social, natural, and cultural resources; integrated territorial governance, including customary and legal rules and procedures as well as the power relations governing the territory; and territorial information, including networks, the capacity of actors to interact, data production, local and indigenous knowledge, and traditional practices.

On the other hand, investing in the capacity-building and empowerment of stakeholders is important in order to ensure that all stakeholder communities can play their roles in a long-term process. Ensuring attention to social dynamics and power imbalances is also important for understanding and implementing territorial approaches in the planning and development of rural tourism. This includes recognizing and addressing power relations, access to resources, infrastructure, services, and their effects on processes and projects. This is particularly significant because territorial approaches bring together actors with diverse and even conflicting interests and perspectives.

For this purpose, the design of inclusive institutional frameworks, as well as moving beyond administrative boundaries through multi-level coordination, is highly important. Such coordination refers to vertical integration at local, regional, and national levels, and horizontal integration of policies and programs across administrative domains and

between rural and urban areas. Ensuring sufficient financial resources, opening up territorial opportunities, and encouraging cross-sectoral investments in tourism destinations are also among the important components that influence the performance of the territorial approach in the planning and development of sustainable and resilient rural tourism. Therefore, without an accurate diagnosis of capacities and without integrated governance, namely horizontal coordination between regions and vertical coordination between governmental levels, tourism programs will not succeed. Moving beyond administrative boundaries and focusing on real spatial linkages constitute the main key to sustainability and resilience in this model.

Conclusion

Recent research suggests that the shortcomings of earlier rural development strategies in responding to issues such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation have made the territorial approach an increasingly necessary and appropriate alternative for rural tourism planning. By moving beyond sectoral, one-dimensional, and fragmented forms of thinking, this approach foregrounds spatial integration and the mobilization of endogenous resources as key mechanisms for strengthening the competitiveness of local productive and institutional systems.

The relationship among sustainability, resilience, and territorial identity constitutes one of the central findings of this study. In rural tourism, sustainability and resilience should not be treated as independent or disconnected concepts; rather, within the territorial approach, they function as mutually reinforcing dimensions. Sustainability is mainly concerned with adaptive capacity and the long-term maintenance of innovative opportunities, whereas resilience strengthens the ability of the tourism system to absorb internal and external shocks, including crises such as COVID-19 or environmental hazards, and to regain dynamism after disruption.

Accordingly, social change, broader structural transformations, and the expansion of scientific and academic capacities appear to have generated new epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations for understanding development, territorial governance, and the territorial approach to rural tourism development. These developments point to the importance of multidisciplinary and multidimensional perspectives, as well as the recognition of diverse knowledge paradigms. At the same time, rural tourism destinations have, in recent years, encountered multiple challenges that have intensified their instability. In response to scientific advances, persistent rural instability, and the need to reduce emerging challenges, the territorial approach has been advanced as a theoretical conception and an alternative framework for planning and developing sustainable and resilient tourism.

Within this theoretical conception, the territorial approach is understood as a framework through which social, economic, and environmental relations interact and are organized across spatial dimensions. In this approach, territories are not defined merely according to the state's requirement to implement public policies. Rather, territory is conceptualized as a complex configuration of the specific characteristics and components of a given social context, connected to the inhabitants of a spatial unit and shaped by its particular resources, as well as by its economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and institutional dimensions.

The typology of the territorial approach, as a public policy strategy, enables sustainable rural tourism development actions to be oriented within a specific space through the convergence of interests among social actors and public agents. On this basis, the territorial approach can make a logical contribution to sustainable and resilient development. It does so by formulating specific policies for synergy and for identifying the Sustainable Development Goals; collectively mobilizing key regional stakeholders to advance sustainable development visions; reinforcing the coordination of vertical and horizontal activities within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals; applying sustainability assessment criteria as an evaluative basis; expanding public access to data dissemination; creating the necessary platforms for coordinating the actions of the private sector and civil society within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals; and establishing strategic conditions for private sector participation.

Within the territorial approach, sustained attention is paid to the effects of rural tourism on destinations and to the external and internal challenges that tourism destinations encounter, especially in relation to territorial sustainability and resilience. This requires identifying the carrying capacity of rural tourism destinations and preserving the environmental and social well-being of these destinations. The reciprocal relationship between tourism and territorial sustainability has ultimately contributed to the formation of the concept of sustainable and resilient tourism. Consequently, rural tourism increasingly depends on the principles of sustainability and resilience.

From a theoretical standpoint, the territorial approach contributes to identifying and prioritizing the most urgent local challenges in rural tourism, while also offering more sustainable and resilient solutions that reflect the social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of a particular place. Ultimately, the territorial approach, as a stage in the paradigmatic transition toward territorial development, should not be viewed solely as an instrument for achieving economic development objectives. Instead, as a new paradigm, it opens a pathway for building rural communities that are more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable, while prioritizing spatial justice and the protection of cultural and natural heritage. This comprehensive perspective provides a scientific foundation for advancing global tourism objectives.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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