

Volunteer perceptions of organic farms in accordance with GSTC criteria: A case study of WWOOF Türkiye **

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ABSTRACT

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The initial objective of this study was to identify and examine the experiences of tourists visiting World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) member farms in Türkiye. This was done to understand the activities carried out within the scope of sustainable tourism in organic farms in Türkiye, to shed light on tourist awareness regarding this issue, and to compare these experiences with the four main criteria and sub-criteria determined by Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) for hotel businesses. Results revealed that tourists shared their experiences under the five main categories (activities, farm/environment, farm owner, accommodation and volunteer) and 13 subcategories with the most comments (farm activities, social activities, and working hours; meals, plants and animals on the field, and landscape/location; the positive attitude of the farm owner and the farm owner's hardworking, enthusiastic, knowledgeable nature; satisfaction with accommodation and information acquisition, recommendation, and family culture/warmth). Results also revealed that the member farms of the WWOOF Türkiye platform do not fully meet GSTC criteria.

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism is often discussed predominantly in terms of its environmental dimension, despite encompassing three fundamental components: social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Butler 1999; Lu and Nepal 2009). According to the definition provided by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Tourism Organization (2005, p.11), sustainability, which must be applied across all areas of tourism, entails environmentally, the efficient use and conservation of natural resources; socially, respecting the socio-cultural structure of the region to support the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage; and economically, fostering a system that provides socio-economic support to stakeholders, ensures the fair distribution of financial resources, and combats poverty.

Referring back to Hunter's (1997) criticism that the implementation of sustainability faces challenges in finding a balance among stakeholders in a competitive sector, leading to the conceptual framework becoming abstract, we can see that certain institutions have taken concrete steps in this field. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria published by the United Nations (UN) in 2010 (GSTC, n.d.-a) provide a certification that accredits institutions and policymakers in


sustainable tourism. The Sustainable Development Goals developed by the UN in 2015 (United Nations Statistical


Commission, 2015) and the Paris Agreement published in the same year (UN, 2015) are also significant developments in the field, aiming for stakeholder countries to collectively act within certain goal frameworks.

In contemporary discourse, novel approaches to sustainable tourism have emerged, including small-scale (Garrod and Fennell, 2023), community-supported, ecologically conscious, participatory in decision-making processes, supportive of collaboration and cultural exchange, and preserving cultural elements (Fennell, 2014; Johansen, 2022; Montes and Kafley, 2019), non-commercialized (Deville, Wearing, and McDonald, 2016; Everingham et al., 2022), education-focused, and sharing-oriented models. Examples of such innovative structures include Workaway and World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). Workaway seeks volunteer visitors for language learning, cultural interaction, or sustainable projects, while WWOOF exemplifies community-supported, small-scale, and sharing-focused models. This study analyzes the mentioned model as a sustainable tourism model by utilizing visitor perspectives from all organic farms registered in WWOOF and located in Türkiye.

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Research Paper

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2. Literature Review

The Concept and Applications of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainability in tourism is not merely a specific type of tourism, but rather practices that should be implemented across all tourism sectors according to UN Environment Program and World Trade Organization (UNEP and WTO 2005), supporting not only the environmental aspect of sustainability but also its social and economic dimensions (Ruhanen, Moyle, & Moyle 2019). Looking at the criteria set forth by the United Nations GSTC for businesses (GSTC, 2016), it aims to provide socio-economic benefits at the local level, support the preservation of cultural heritage, minimize environmental impact, and also assess the level of management support in this regard, encompassing three fundamental components. Developing a sustainable tourism model is a dynamic process, considering the presence of technological advancements, evolving consumer demands, emerging issues, and new solutions (Streimikiene et al., 2021). Additionally, to maintain balance among the three fundamental components (Ruhanen, Moyle, & Moyle, 2019), there is a need for trade-offs among objectives (Bramwell et al., 2017). Despite debates regarding the effectiveness of sustainable tourism practices and the limited utilization of significant theories explaining social life (Bramwell, 2015; Graham, 2005), studies in the field continue to increase significantly (Ruhanen, Moyle, & Moyle, 2019).

Novel Sustainable Tourism Models

Alongside climate change, behavioral change has gained importance in recent years, believed to be associated with shifts in consumer habits (Ruhanen, Moyle, & Moyle, 2019). Indeed, the evolution of perspectives on sustainable tourism is now driving change both from top-down, as defined by responsible institutions in current regulations, and from bottom-up. On the other hand, there has been the development of websites and applications that inform consumers about sustainable products and services, support ethical consumption, and provide non-profit content or user-generated content, tailored for tourism and other sectors. This structure also lays the groundwork for bottom-up change. This change bears similarities to the elements described by Prosser (1994) concerning the social change induced by sustainable tourism, which the researcher identifies as dissatisfaction with existing products, increased environmental and cultural sensitivity, scarcity of resources, and changes in attitudes among service providers. As an example of this novel structure and change, 'Be A Responsible Traveller,' established within the United Nations, is a campaign aimed at promoting awareness of taking responsibility for our tourist activities and increasing awareness of illegal practices encountered (United Nations World Tourism Organization, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, & United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n.d.). Another example is 'The Center for

Responsible Travel,' a non-profit organization established in 2003, which focuses on the conservation of resources and empowerment of local communities through small-scale ecotourism (Center for Responsible Travel, n.d.). Similarly, the WWOOF network is a non-profit formation that supports technical knowledge and cultural exchange between organic farmers and visitors (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, n.d.). Another example is 'The Center for Responsible Travel,' a non-profit organization established in 2003, which focuses on the conservation of resources and empowerment of local communities through small-scale ecotourism (Center for Responsible Travel, n.d.). Similarly, the WWOOF network is a non-profit formation that supports technical knowledge and cultural exchange between organic farmers and visitors (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, n.d.). In small-scale touristic enterprises, as a result of empowering locals, tourists turn in to guests rather than customers (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Another platform that offers tourism opportunities in this way is Workaway. Like WWOOF, Workaway also allows local hosts to manage tourism independently, allowing them to derive benefits from hosting guests according to their own needs, thereby contributing to the social sustainability of a destination (Ullius, 2022).

WWOOF Model and TaTuTa

WWOOF, aiming to connect individuals seeking worldwide volunteer opportunities on organic farms with organic farm owners, was founded in the United Kingdom in 1971 (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, n.d.). Originating as a hippie movement (Cronauer, 2012), WWOOF can also be referred to as a form of ecotourism (Pollard et al., 2023). This type, also known as volunteer tourism, is believed to have an educational aspect that fosters participants' transformation for a better world (Deville and Wearing, 2013; Pritchard and Morgan, 2013; Sin, 2009). Described as a form of exchange-based travel and offering non-commercial services/products as an alternative to mainstream consumption, WWOOF, which can be termed as a barter-based travel type, seeks social justice, environmental consciousness, and a community-oriented perspective (Deville, Wearing, & McDonald, 2016; Pollard et al., 2023). Ullius (2022) covers motivations for WWOOF participation, including elements such as social benefit, cultural interaction, enjoyment, meeting like-minded individuals, forming friendships, feeling like part of a family, language learning, changing perceptions of travel, exchange of knowledge and experience, diversity of work/places, and accessibility. In this sense, it embraces an ethical and eco-friendly approach while also focusing on the local community (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Kosnik, 2014). The direct involvement of visitors in agricultural activities transforms this form of agritourism into a distinctive activity characterized by direct engagement (See Philip, Hunter, & Blackstone, 2010, A typology for defining agritourism). Researchers who engaged with WWOOF organic farm

owners in Australia within the scope of ecotourism point out the dominance of a family/clan culture on the farms (Pollard et al., 2023). This interaction not only shortens the food supply chain (Johansen, 2022) but also can be perceived as intimate by the visitors. In volunteer work, the advantages of authentic interaction with the local community, gaining social status, and making life more meaningful (Erni and Shi-chi Leung, 2019; Mustonen, 2007) can be assumed to be reflected in WWOOF as well. Similarly, according to some researchers, visitors are motivated less by labor and more by cultural interaction, non-monetary exchange, and personal development processes (Bunn, 2014; Mostafanezhad et al., 2016). Dulal and Mu (2023), likening this interaction to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), also suggest that the communicative host's daily interaction with the WWOOFer constitutes a teaching process. On the other hand, Lai et al. (2020) define WWOOF as a social movement against commercialized agricultural activities. Additionally, a study conducted in Türkiye also demonstrates that farm owners take a stand against the destructiveness of mass tourism (Civelek, Dalgın, & Çeken, 2013). Additionally, conflicts between hosts and volunteers have been a subject of different research. Johansen (2022) indicates that conflicts may arise from power imbalances, such as the host's ownership of the space and the volunteers' dependence on the host for food and shelter, as well as the host's ability to reject visitors. Conflicts may also stem from long working hours for volunteers and the host's indifference (Mostafanezhad et al., 2015), privacy issues for the host alongside time and money allocated to visitors (McIntosh & Campbell, 2001; Ullius, 2022), volunteers' mistakes in their work (Terry, 2014), overuse of certain resources by visitors (Wengel et al., 2018), and language barriers (Ullius, 2022). Furthermore, volunteer tourism, due to the power imbalance it creates between hosts and visitors, has prompted alternative forms of tourism based on mutual exchange, such as meeting the need for food and accommodation in exchange for work (Flaig, 2019). In Türkiye, the project "Agrotourism and Voluntary Exchange of Knowledge and Experience in Ecological Farms" (referred to as Agriculture Tourism Exchange TaTuTa) carried out by the Association for Supporting Ecological Living of Buğday was supported by the United Nations Development Programme Global Environment Facility (UNDP - GEF) between 2003 and 2006.

Today, it has evolved into WWOOF Türkiye (Buğday Association for Supporting Ecological Living, n.d.). Therefore, the activities carried out within the scope of TaTuTa are also related to WWOOF farms in Türkiye. In the limited number of studies conducted on TaTuTa farms in Türkiye, various issues have been examined. For instance, Akın et al. (2021) examined the measures taken by farm owners during the pandemic period. Şekerli (2018) explored the extent to which the TaTuTa project has achieved its purpose. Civelek, Dalgın, and Çeken (2013)

investigated the success criteria for the sustainability of agro-tourism in TaTuTa farms in Muğla region through participant observation. According to the comments in the study conducted by Civelek et al. (2013), it was stated that the sustainable use of natural resources is also included in the establishment objectives of enterprises; activities such as the orientation of enterprises towards alternative energy sources, waste separation, application of organic farming methods and architectural transformation without damaging natural areas were evaluated within this scope. Volunteers participating in WWOOF, which is called WWOOFers, are mostly between 20-29 age (69%), single (61%), well educated as 82% has graduate degree, 64% is not a member of voluntary organizations except WWOOF and have empathic personality trait based on a study carried in Norway (Nordbo, Segovia-Perez & Mykletun, 2020). Another study carried in New Zealand defines WWOOFers to be at an age of 26.7 in average, 62.2% female, 43.3% students with the highest value, 69% single (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Although there is not sufficient knowledge on WWOOFers' profile in Türkiye, Kılıç and Kurnaz (2010) analyzed a farm in Türkiye as a case study within the scope of TaTuTa, and it was stated that the educational level of the visitors was high and they were middle-aged. Additionally, Ahmadova and Akova (2016) claims that there has been a shift in visitors' profile from international to national in recent years.

GSTC Criteria

GSTC is a non-profit organization established in United States of America (USA), working as a visual network which enables the council to consider cultural, economic and political differences around the world (GSTC, n.d.-a). GSTC, proposes a variety of criteria based on four main themes: "sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural impacts and environmental impacts" for industry and destination (GSTC, n.d.-b). There are four main criteria and sub-criteria determined by GSTC for hotel businesses. The criteria are listed in Table 1.

WOOF model as a voluntary eco-tourism which emphasizes sustainability, may raise questions about economic and social sustainability specifically. Based on the findings of previous research, education, social interaction, and exchanging knowledge are linked to social responsibility; while economic sustainability remains a controversial area, as the WWOOFers are not necessarily getting any payment. We did not encounter any research analyzing WWOOF for GSTC criteria, so this research aims to explore the relationship between WWOOF model and its sustainability based on GSTC Criteria.

3. Methodology

Content analysis is a research method used to derive reproducible insights from texts or other meaningful materials in their contexts (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 24). It involves systematically coding and categorizing textual data to identify trends and patterns such as word frequency,

Table 1. GSTC Hotel Criteria

A: “Demonstrate effective sustainable management”	C: “Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts”
Sustainability management system Legal compliance Reporting and communication Staff engagement Customer experience Accurate promotion Buildings and infrastructure Compliance Impact and integrity Sustainable practices and materials Access for all Land, water, and property rights Information and interpretation Destination engagement	Cultural interactions Protecting cultural heritage Presenting culture and heritage Artefacts D: “Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts” Protecting the resources Eco-friendly purchasing Efficient purchasing Energy saving Water conservation Reducing pollution Greenhouse gas emissions Transport Wastewater Solid waste
B: “Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts”	
Community support Local employment Local purchasing Local entrepreneurs Exploitation and harassment Equal opportunity Decent work Community services Local livelihoods	Harmful substances Reduce pollution to a minimum level Conserving ecosystem Protecting biodiversity Invasive species Opportunity to visit natural sites Encounters with wildlife Animal welfare Wildlife harvesting and trade

Source: GSTC, 2024

relationships, and communication structures (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 400). The coding process organizes content for easier retrieval, helping researchers interpret data differently (Forman & Damschroder, 2007, p. 48; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 107). Ensuring coding reliability is crucial, often achieved by multiple researchers independently coding the data and resolving discrepancies (Forman & Damschroder, 2007, p. 55; Weber, 1990, p. 12). Categorization, the main feature of content analysis, can be deductive or inductive, with the latter often used in qualitative studies (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 108; Mayring, 2015, p. 374).

Accordingly, the farm experiences of WWOOF members were examined in order to understand the activities carried out within the scope of sustainable tourism in organic farms in Türkiye, to shed light on tourist awareness, and to compare the categories with the four main criteria and sub-criteria determined by GSTC for hotel businesses. At the time the study was carried out, there were 67 farms in Türkiye that were members of the platform. For this purpose, all comments, which were 154 comments, made on the website of WWOOF at 03.11.2023 for 67 farms that are members of the platform were subjected to content analysis. In the light of the information provided, the data were obtained using Selenium, pandas (McKinney, 2012), and the webdriver-manager library in Python (see Appendix 1 for the code). First the links to the farms are extracted from <https://wwoofturkey.org/tr/hosts> then each link is visited to gather the comments. The coding of the content is carried in an Excel file located in Google Drive for the benefit of real-time collaborative editing. At the first step, data were coded deductively where categories are developed directly from the data. The coding processes were compared and appropriate codes were determined by discussing the inconsistent codes. In this way, coding

consistency, in other words, coding reliability was tried to be ensured. In the second stage of content analysis, the codes obtained were categorized based on the inductive categorization process. In this context, five main categories were identified: activities, farm/environment, farm owner, accommodation and volunteer, and subcategories are listed in the Findings section. The highest variety in sub-categories are recognized to be in the Volunteer category, revealing emotions, and attitudes of visitors.

4. Findings

4.1. Results of Content Analysis

Within the activities category, the most emphasized topics in the comments made by tourists regarding their experiences are presented in Figure 1. Accordingly, farm/meal events, farm activities, working time and workload, and social activities were the most emphasized topics.

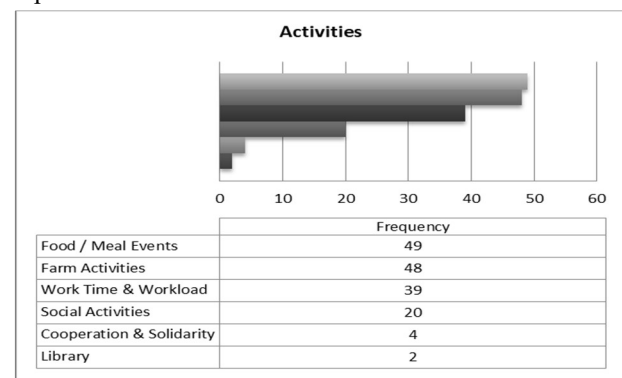


Figure 1. Frequency of the Category Activities

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

In the comments made by the tourists about their experiences, the most emphasized issues within the farm/environment category are presented in Figure 2. Accordingly, plant and animal species, and landscape/location, and high quality and organic harvest are the most emphasized topics by tourists.

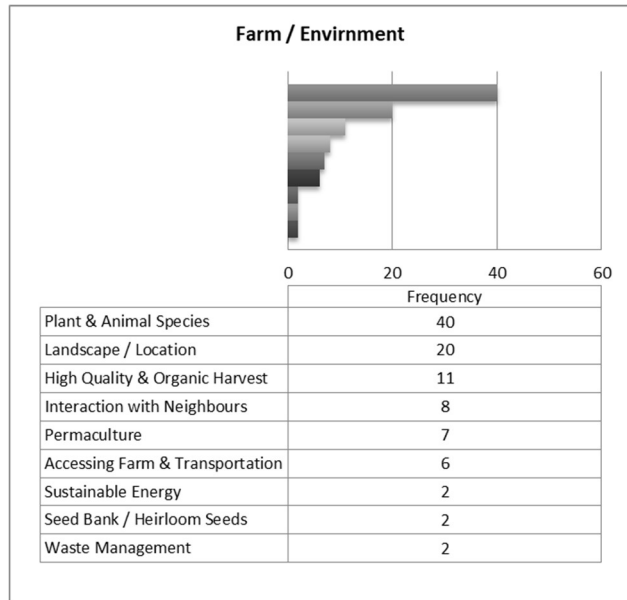
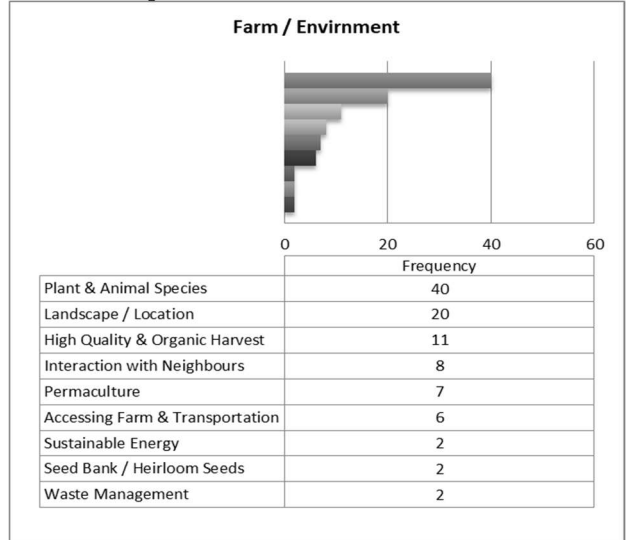


Figure 2. Frequency of the Category Farm/Environment

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

The most emphasized elements in the comments under the



category of farm owner are presented in Figure 3. According to this, the positive approach of the farm owner and the fact that the farm owner being hardworking, willing, enthusiastic and knowledgeable are the most emphasized elements.

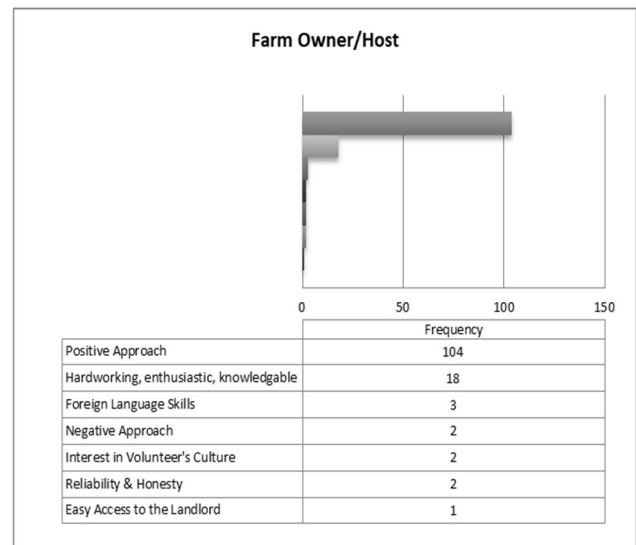


Figure 3. Frequency of the Category Farm Owner

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

The most emphasized topics related to the accommodation category are presented in Figure 4. Accordingly, tourists have mostly provided information about their satisfaction with accommodation, recommendation and the duration of their stay within the scope of the relevant category.

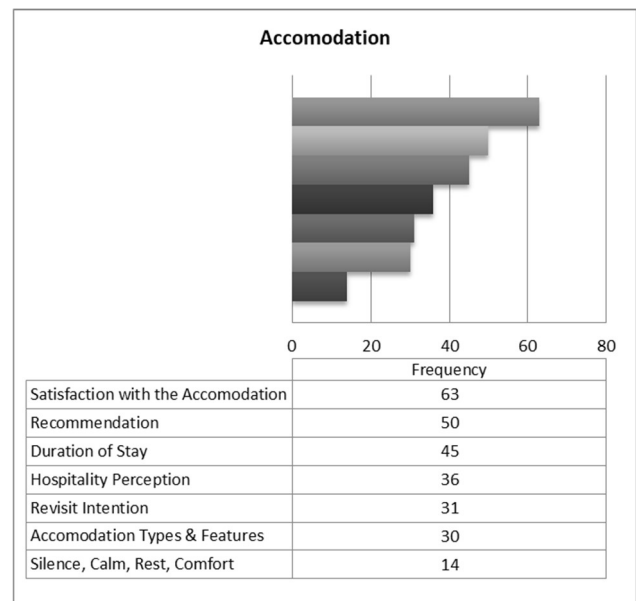


Figure 4. Frequency of the Category Accommodation

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

The most emphasized elements within the volunteer category are presented in Figure 5. Accordingly, getting information, family culture/warmth, and fun, joyful, hopeful experience were the most frequently mentioned elements by tourists.

Table 2. Sample Comments on Accurate Promotion of Farms

Comments	Categories
"...I can't thank you enough for the incredible experience I had on your farm..."	Volunteer > Fun, Joyful, Hopeful Experience & Volunteer's sense of well being
"...I'm glad I came to this place..."	Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being
"...I strongly hope to see you again!..."	Volunteer > Revisit
"...It is my dream to rejoin this precious space that life gives me the opportunity to experience..."	Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being
"...It was a marvelous experience in every aspect..."	Volunteer > Fun, Joyful, Hopeful Experience
"...Volunteering has been a unique experience for me that I am glad I did..."	Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being
"...My overall experience was amazing..."	Volunteer > Fun, Joyful, Hopeful Experience & Volunteer's sense of well being

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

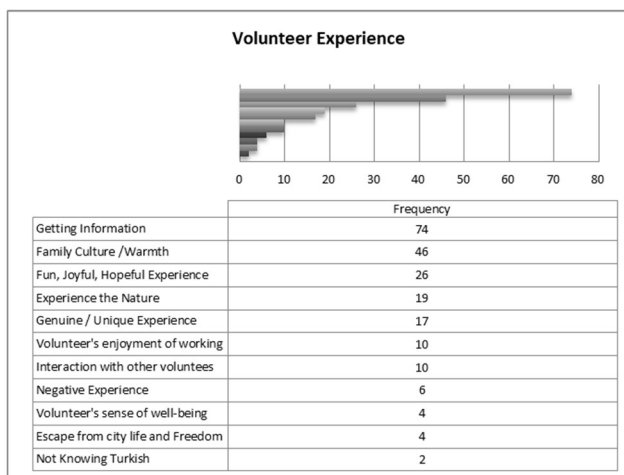


Figure 5. Frequency of the Category Volunteer Experience

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Comparing Categories with GSTC Criteria

A: "Demonstrate effective sustainable management"

Accurate Promotion: The WWOOF platform can be considered an important resource for the promotion of

farms. Considering user reviews on the platform, it is noted that there have been no complaints in this sense, on the contrary, it has been a positive experience beyond expectations. This shows that the information shared by the farms for promotional purposes is truthful and does not mislead the users. In this sense, it can be said that the enterprises make their promotions in a truthful manner. Customer experience, encompassing sustainability factors, is regularly monitored and corrective actions are implemented as needed (GSTC, 2024). The information that the enterprises have a direct customer feedback system as stated in the criterion could not be reached. However, it is believed that the comments shared by the guests on the WWOOF platform can be considered as feedback for the businesses. It is not possible to say that businesses respond to all of the feedback made on the platform. Some of the comments shared are in Table 2.

Information and interpretation: The organization offers information and guidance on natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage, along with appropriate behavior for visiting these areas and sites (GSTC, 2024). The comments shared under the subcategory of "being hardworking, willing, enthusiastic, knowledgeable" within the farm owner category can be accepted to meet the

Table 3. Sample Comments on the Impact and Integrity of Natural and Cultural Resources.

Comments	Categories
"...I got used to the peaceful mornings I woke up to thanks to the partridges, birds, the bells of the cows grazing ahead, the beautiful atmosphere created by the trees and the wonderful dogs of the farm in a very short time..."	Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being Accomodation > Silence, Calm, Rest, Comfort Farm/Environment > Plant, Animal Species
"...especially when we are surrounded by chickens, turkeys, geese, and our friendly dogs :) Vegetable gardens, among colorful roses ..."	Farm/Environment > Plant, Animal Species
"...lots of pets, two lovely dogs ..."	Farm/Environment > Plant, Animal Species
"...beautiful location and view of the farm ..."	Farm/Environment > Landscape Location
"...we had the opportunity to work with pleasure and in nature without getting bored ..."	Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of wellbeing Activities > Farm Activities
"...has a beautiful view over the valley and is not far from the sea..."	Farm/Environment > Landscape Location
"...The farm has a unique view that you can hardly find with money..."	Farm/Environment > Landscape Location
"...It is hard not to recommend this place when the unique nature of the Black Sea is added to the kindness of the family..."	Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being
"...In the evening, we looked at the unique views of the sunset while collecting bush-wood for burning..."	Volunteer > Family Culture / Warmth
"...Their living quarters, where they have built almost everything with their own hands, are truly surrounded by nature, surrounded by mountain strawberry trees and a pine forest..."	Activities > Farm Activities
"...we surrendered to a sound sleep with the pleasure of drinking tea against the island of Lesbos and the intoxication of watching millions of stars winking at us in the sky in the pitch black of the night..."	Farm/Environment > Landscape Location & Plant, Animal Species
	Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
	Accomodation > Silence, Calm, Rest, Comfort
	Farm/Environment > Landscape Location
	Volunteer > Escape From City Life and Freedom

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Table 4. Sample Comments on Protecting local community access to natural and cultural sites, raising awareness about the impacts of tourism

Comments	Categories
"...the philosophy underlying the mode of production and way of life, and the theory behind the practices..."	Farm/environment > Farm Activities Farm Owner > Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"I would like to say that these gatherings, carried out in collaboration with WWOOF, nurture the hope that life can be transformed into something better and more beautiful"	Volunteer > Getting Information Activities > Farm Activities
"Gaining such a diverse range of experiences in such a short time has been a very valuable example for me of how ecological living should be"	Volunteer > Getting Information Activities > Farm Activities

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

specified criterion. Some of the comments shared are as follows.

Additionally, some comments were shared regarding working hours and conditions, but no comments indicating misinformation has been encountered. One example is; "...The hours of working might be a bit high for people with less farming experiences...". On the other hand, there are rare comments shared regarding the criterion, such as "...We were never informed about the snake...". Considering the impact and integrity of natural and cultural resources (GSTC, 2024), the criteria ensure that tourism

positively influences the environment, local communities, and the economy. It emphasizes transparency and accountability in sustainability practices. Impact refers to the tangible benefits of these practices on tourism, while integrity ensures that sustainability claims are genuine and verifiable. Amongst others, the practices expressed under the subcategories of "plants and animals species" and "landscape/location" under the farm/environment category are considered to meet this criterion, as can be seen in Table 3.

The comments that can be considered as feedback, were generally positive. Guests had no significant complaints about neither farms nor their experiences. Additionally, natural and cultural assets or events mentioned in the comments show that guests had the opportunity to gain in depth knowledge about nature, local culture, and sustainable agriculture.

B: "Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts"

Monitoring and reporting the economic contributions of tourism to the destination's economy, ensuring equal employment and training opportunities for the local population: In the visitor comments, there is no direct mention of this issue, however, the structure of the

Supporting community and sustainability initiatives and promoting local entrepreneurs and fair trade practices: WWOOF volunteer reviews are most commonly characterized by the social contributions provided by the farmers. Community supported agriculture can be considered as a community service to support and experience local livelihoods. The platform accordingly promotes local entrepreneurs and fair-trade practices through its focus on sustainable agricultural methods and local economic support.

C: "Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts" The organization integrates genuine aspects of both traditional and modern local culture into its activities, design, décor, food, and shops,

WWOOF platform is designed to provide both financial and moral benefits to local businesses. Therefore, the elements mentioned in this criterion are supported due to the fundamental structure of WWOOF. As an economical contribution, volunteers can purchase the goods produced in the farm, to have the opportunity for healthy food and support the farmer, who are local entrepreneurs in this context. Protecting local community access to natural and cultural sites, raising awareness about the impacts of tourism: The fact that the enterprises where WWOOF activities are conducted are not in city centers but in locations that are relatively harder to access helps them remain in their natural areas. Statements aimed at raising awareness have been expressed in many comments, as seen in Table 4.

while honoring the intellectual property rights of the local communities (GSTC, 2024). Within the "social activities" and "farm activities" sub-categories under the "activities" category, guests interacting with the local community, attending local weddings and organizing local-specific activities in some establishments are considered to meet the stated criterion. Besides the "volunteer" category contributes to this section with; "fun, joyful, hopeful experience", "family culture/warmth", "volunteer's enjoyment of working", "hospitality perception", "getting information" and "interaction with other volunteers", as seen in Table 5.

In the comments, there were no remarks regarding intellectual property rights; rather, the comments emphasized the importance of information sharing, and no information was shared concerning the protection of the rights of the idea owner. From a sustainability perspective, the primary reason for the proliferation of alternative farming methods such as permaculture is to minimize the damage to nature. It is anticipated that if technology-intensive and environmentally friendly methods are

Table 5. Sample Comments on Maximizing Benefits to Cultural Heritage and Minimizing Negative Impacts

Comments	Categories
"...we have all kinds of percussion instruments such as darbuka, drums, djembe at home and they are open for your use; we had little jam sessions together ..."	Activities > Social Activities & Cooperation/Solidarity Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being & Interaction with Other Volunteers
"...workers were invited to sit with the family and share the varied home cooked fare of a fully fledged Anatolian kitchen..."	Activities > Social Activities & Cooperation/Solidarity
"...tea after dinner, the sazes played make this place much more meaningful than just an agricultural land. ..."	Activities > Social Activities Volunteer > Volunteer's sense of well being
"...after collecting fresh vegetables from the backyard garden, we visited two separate fields with a tractor and learnt about growing, grafting, harvesting almonds, pistachio, fig, plum, walnut, ahlut, oak, chitlenbik in the first one...."	Activities > Farm Activities Farm/Environment > Landscape Location & Plant, Animal Species Volunteer > Getting Information & Volunteer's Enjoyment of Working
"...we shared the farm work (hoeing, drying fruit, pruning flowers, planting pots, feeding the goats, etc.) we ate our meals together under the acorns ..."	Activities > Farm Activities & Social Activities Farm/Environment > Landscape Location & Plant, Animal Species Volunteer > Volunteer's Enjoyment of Working
"...we harvested sesame seeds, and though it was hard work, the working environment was fantastic...."	Farm/Environment > Landscape Location & Plant, Animal Species Activities > Farm Activities Volunteer > Volunteer's Enjoyment of Working
"...If you want to experience authentic Turkish life and culture, this is the farm for you!..."	Volunteer > Genuine / Uniqueness & Family Culture / Warmth
"...Singing and working together was the best part..."	Activities > Farm Activities & Social Activities Volunteer > Volunteer's Enjoyment of Working

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

applied on WWOOF farms, intellectual property rights may come to the forefront.

In the comments suggesting the farm, the expression "non-toxic agriculture", which is associated with natural and environmentalist methods of agriculture, draws attention. Furthermore, one comment emphasizes the absence of sound and noise pollution; "...Away from sound and light pollution, you can sleep peacefully and wake up with a beautiful sunrise..." which can be categorized under Accommodation->Silence, Calm, Rest, Comfort. Solid waste, including food waste, is measured, with mechanisms in place to reduce waste and, where reduction is not feasible, to reuse or recycle it, ensuring that any residual waste disposal does not adversely affect the local population or the environment (GSTC, 2024). The practices expressed in the "waste management" sub-category under the Farm/Environment category are considered to meet the specified criteria. However, opinions on waste management were expressed in only two comments. In this sense, it can be assumed that although farms generally meet the related criteria, there is room for improvement in waste management in WWOOF farms.

5. Conclusion

The initial objective of this study was to identify and examine the experiences of tourists visiting WWOOF member farms in Türkiye. This was done to understand the activities carried out within the scope of sustainable tourism in organic farms in Türkiye, to shed light on tourist awareness regarding this issue, and to compare these

D: "Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts"

The use of harmful substances, such as pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized and replaced when possible by harmless alternatives, with all chemical storage, use, handling, and disposal properly managed, while the organization also implements practices to minimize pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting substances, and contaminants in air, water, and soil (GSTC, 2024). The environmentally sensitive and environmentally friendly agricultural practices applied in the farms are emphasized in several categories and some of the comments shared are in Table 6.

Table 6. Sample Comments on Environmental Benefits and Minimizing Harm

Comments	Categories
"...They separate organic waste and feed it to animals - they do not use chemical products..."	Farm/Environment -> Waste Management
"...They cultivated their soils with a permaculture approach and simple methods such as composting, mulching, conscious planting without using chemicals against pests, soil aeration, resting and irrigation..."	Farm/Environment -> Permaculture; Waste Management
"...[Owner] answered and enlightened my tens of questions about the continuity of soil fertility, conscious use of water resources, human & nature & drug-free food one by one..."	Farm Owner / Host -> Hardworking, Enthusiastic, Knowledgeable Volunteer Experience -> Getting Information
"...Non-toxic agriculture means health and you can buy and consume its products with peace of mind..."	Farm/Environment -> high quality and organic harvest Farm/Environment -> high quality and organic harvest
"...I can easily recommend [farm] for city dwellers to access non-toxic products online..."	Accommodation -> Recommendation Farm/Environment -> high quality and organic harvest

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

experiences with the four main criteria and sub-criteria determined by GSTC for hotel businesses. Based on the content analysis, the current study identified five main categories (activities, farm/environment, farm owner, accommodation, and volunteer) and subcategories with the most comments (arm/meal events, farm activities, working time and workload, social activities, plant and animal species, and landscape/location, and high quality and organic harvest, the positive approach of the farm owner and hardworking, willing, enthusiastic and knowledgeable, satisfaction with accommodation, recommendation and the duration of stay, getting information, family culture/warmth, and fun, joyful, hopeful experience). These main and subcategories can be seen as the motivational factors for tourists visiting WWOOF farms in Türkiye. Zengin and Savgın (2016) stated that the motivations of visitors attending farm tourism is generally seeking a peaceful environment away from

the stress, while according to Köroğlu et al. (2019) mental relaxation is most important motivations for visiting ecological farms. On the other hand, Nordbo et al. (2023) identified seven motivational factors that influence Norwegians to participate in WWOOF activities: Immigration, Escapism, Genuine Local/Cultural Interest, Sustainable Lifestyle, Cheap Travel, Economic and Political Constraints, and the Image of the visitor and host. Thus, one may suggest that this finding is consistent with previous studies. The current study revealed that tourists are generally satisfied with their experiences. This finding is supported by previous studies, which showed that visitors who participated in these kind of tourism activities are generally satisfied with their experiences (Köroğlu et al., 2019; Özdemir et al., 2019; Şekerli 2018; Yıldırım, 2018). Additionally, it was found that tourists tend to recommend participating in such tourism activities. The present finding seems to be consistent with other research, which found a high intention to recommend visiting ecological farms to others (Köroğlu et al., 2019). Based on the most commented subcategories, another important finding was that tourists gained new information from their experiences. In accordance with this finding, a previous study conducted by Şahbudak and Şimşek (2017) stated that different workshops and courses on organic agriculture, permaculture, ecological architecture, ecological tourism and ecological literacy are organized by farms and information about ecological life is transferred to visitors and other farm owners. Moreover, the study found that family culture/warmth is seen as one of the important elements of WWOOF farms in Türkiye. This finding is congruent with the study by Pollard et al.'s (2023), which concluded that family/clan culture dominates farms in Australia. This suggests that WWOOF farms, regardless of their location, provide the family culture and warmth that individuals seek in the modern world. To determine whether the activities of WWOOF farms, which can be considered in the context of sustainable tourism, support the concept of sustainability,

GSTC criteria were used as a basis. Thus, the categories and subcategories obtained were compared to the four main criteria and sub-criteria determined by GSTC for hotel businesses. The results suggest that the member farms of the WWOOF Türkiye platform do not fully meet these criteria. Based on the identified categories, it is possible to say that among the determined criteria, the criteria demonstrate effective sustainable management (accurate promotion, customer experience, information and interpretation, impact and integrity); maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts (presenting culture and heritage); and maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts (harmful substances, minimize pollution, solid waste) were partially reflected by the farms. Additionally, in terms of encouraging public participation in destination planning as mentioned within the GSTC framework, one of the improvement suggestions understood within the scope of this study is that local governments can benefit from the experiences of WWOOF enterprises.

Türkiye's Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), in partnership with GSTC, runs a sustainable tourism program in which accommodation establishments undergo a 3-stage evaluation and those that successfully pass all stages receive a "Sustainable Tourism Certificate". Within the scope of this program, there are 153 accommodation establishments with tourism management and investment management certificates that are currently in the certification process, 16200 that have passed the 1st stage and 1177 that have completed the 3rd stage and are entitled to receive the relevant certificate, by the time of 17 October 2024 (TGA, 2024). This result may be explained by the fact that accommodation facilities are evaluated within the framework of the program, whereas farms cannot be considered as traditional accommodation facilities. Hence, it can be inferred that it is usual for farms registered on the platform to meet the limited number of GSTC criteria. However, the services offered by farms and social and farm activities carried out are directly related to the concept of sustainability.

These findings suggest that, in general, individuals had positive opinions about their experiences in the WWOOF farms, even though the farms do not fully meet the criteria determined by GSTC. It should be kept in mind that the GSTC criteria are not a single criterion or document that shows the extent to which sustainability is fulfilled but rather a practice that indicates that facilities care about sustainability. In the future, farms can also be included in the sustainable tourism program, where currently only accommodation facilities are evaluated. In this way, the importance given by farms to sustainability can be known not only by individuals interested in this niche market but also by individuals who want to have a different tourism experience.

Finally, considering a number of important limitations, the most significant limitation is that the current study has only

examined the comments shared by tourists. Thus, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of all individuals, as there may be those who have not shared their experiences. In future studies, more in-depth information can be obtained by interviewing people who have had this experience. Secondly, the scope of this study was limited to WWOOF farms in Türkiye. Further research might investigate the similarities and differences in the experiences of individuals who have participated in similar activities in different destinations and countries. Besides, a draft proposal regarding sustainability criteria on farms can be prepared in future studies

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Appendix 1. Sample Comments on Information and Interpretation

Comments	Categories
"...They informed me about many things and helped me a lot to evaluate the free workshops at [farm]."	Volunteer > Getting Information Activities > Social Activities Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"...I have met so many beautiful souls and gained so much valuable information that I am grateful to each of you individually..."	Volunteer > Getting Information & Volunteer's sense of wellbeing Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"...I would like to thank [Owner] for her hospitality and for sharing very valuable information with pleasure, I would like to thank [Owner] for initiating a wonderful project..."	Volunteer > Getting Information Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"[Owner] is like a book that answers all your questions in detail, enjoys sharing his experience, constantly thinks about your needs, and that we will need for the transformation of our human values as well as the ecological transformation of our world."	Volunteer > Getting Information Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"...I would like to thank [Owner] again for sharing with us the ancient knowledge about sustainable agriculture..."	Volunteer > Getting Information Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"...During my accommodation, I learned about ancestral seed, soil structure, seedling growing and planting, vermicompost, liquid fertilizer and many other things [Owner]'s sincere and bored response to every question we asked, her love and excitement for her work was very nice..."	Volunteer > Getting Information Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable Activities > Farm Activities
"...I learned so much about tree species and silvopasture from [Owner], who is a fountain of knowledge..."	Volunteer > Getting Information Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable Farm/Environment > Plant, Animal Species Volunteer > Getting Information Activities > Farm Activities
"...We learned a lot about organic agriculture in Central Anatolia, about life and culture in Türkiye and about their family..."	Volunteer > Getting Information Activities > Farm Activities Farm/Environment > Plant, Animal Species
"...We learnt valuable information about medicinal and aromatic plants and grape growing and many other crops they cultivate for..."	Volunteer > Getting Information Farm Owner > Positive Approach & Being Hardworking, Willing, Enthusiastic and Knowledgeable
"...[Owner] answered and enlightened my tens of questions about the continuity of soil fertility, conscious use of water resources, human & nature & drug-free food one by one..."	

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

INFO PAGE

Volunteer Perceptions of Organic Farms in Accordance with GSTC Criteria: A Case Study of WWOOF Türkiye**Abstract**

The initial objective of this study was to identify and examine the experiences of tourists visiting WWOOF member farms in Türkiye. This was done to understand the activities carried out within the scope of sustainable tourism in organic farms in Türkiye, to shed light on tourist awareness regarding this issue, and to compare these experiences with the four main criteria and sub-criteria determined by GSTC for hotel businesses. Results revealed that tourists shared their experiences under the five main categories (activities, farm/environment, farm owner, accommodation and volunteer) and 13 subcategories with the most comments (farm activities, social activities, and working hours; meals, plants and animals on the field, and landscape/location; the positive attitude of the farm owner and the farm owner's hardworking, enthusiastic, knowledgeable nature; satisfaction with accommodation and information acquisition, recommendation, and family culture/warmth). Results also revealed that the member farms of the WWOOF Türkiye platform do not fully meet GSTC criteria.

Keywords: WWOOF, sustainability, GSTC, farm, Türkiye.

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Oğuz Doğan:	Conceptualism, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing	%60
Eda Evla Mutlu:	Software, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization	%40

Author statement: Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. **Declaration of Conflicting Interests:** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

This paper does not required ethics committee report

Justification: The methodology of this study does not require an ethics committee report.