

Linking Motivational Theories to Human Resource Management Challenges in Rural Tourism and Agritourism: The Case of Albania

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Abstract

The tourism industry represents one of the most important contributors to economic development and employment generation worldwide. In Albania, the rapid expansion of tourism and agritourism has increased the demand for qualified and motivated human resources. Despite the sector's economic importance, tourism businesses continue to face major challenges related to employee motivation, job satisfaction, workforce retention, seasonality, informal employment, and limited professional training. This literature review aims to analyze the relationship between motivational theories and human resource management (HRM) challenges within the tourism and agritourism sector, with a particular focus on the Albanian context. The study synthesizes international and regional literature related to employee motivation, HRM practices, employee performance, and tourism workforce management.

The review is based on academic studies retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink databases published between 2010 and 2025. The findings demonstrate that employee motivation significantly influences job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity, and service quality in tourism businesses. Intrinsic motivational factors, including recognition, career development, autonomy, and work environment, are strongly associated with employee retention and performance. At the same time, extrinsic factors such as salary, working conditions, and job security remain critical in seasonal tourism economies.

The analysis also reveals that Albania's tourism sector faces persistent HRM challenges, including labor shortages, migration, lack of professional training, and limited strategic HRM implementation. Rural tourism and agritourism enterprises experience additional difficulties due to seasonality, family-based management structures, and insufficient

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investment in employee development. The review identifies important research gaps, particularly the limited number of empirical studies examining motivation and HRM practices in Albanian tourism.

The article concludes that integrating motivational theories into HRM strategies can improve employee wellbeing, organizational sustainability, and service quality in tourism and agritourism businesses. The study contributes to the existing literature by synthesizing theoretical and practical perspectives while proposing recommendations for policymakers, tourism managers, and future researchers.

Keywords: human resource management; employee motivation; tourism industry; agritourism; rural tourism; employee performance; job satisfaction; albania

JEL Codes: C61; C63; L81

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic economic sectors globally, contributing significantly to employment generation, regional development, and economic growth. In developing countries such as Albania, tourism has emerged as a strategic sector capable of promoting economic diversification and sustainable development. During the last decade, Albania has experienced a considerable increase in international tourist arrivals, investments in hospitality infrastructure, and development of rural tourism and agritourism initiatives.

The rapid growth of the tourism industry has simultaneously increased the demand for qualified human resources capable of delivering high-quality services. Human resources represent one of the most critical assets within tourism organizations because service quality largely depends on employee behavior, motivation, communication, and customer interaction. Unlike manufacturing industries, tourism products are highly dependent on human interaction and emotional labor, making employee performance essential for organizational success.

Despite the sector's growth potential, tourism organizations continue to face multiple human resource management challenges. High employee turnover, seasonal employment, lack of professional training, poor working conditions, and insufficient employee motivation remain common issues in tourism and hospitality businesses worldwide. These problems are particularly evident in developing economies where labor market instability, migration, and informal employment create additional pressures on tourism enterprises.

In Albania, the tourism sector faces substantial workforce-related difficulties. Many tourism businesses report shortages of qualified employees, especially during peak tourist seasons. The migration of young professionals, limited vocational education, and inadequate strategic HRM practices negatively affect organizational performance and service quality. Furthermore, rural tourism and agritourism businesses often operate as

family-owned enterprises with limited managerial expertise and insufficient investment in employee development.

Employee motivation is considered one of the most influential factors affecting organizational performance, productivity, service quality, and employee retention. Motivational theories developed by scholars such as Maslow, Herzberg, McGregor, and Deci and Ryan provide important frameworks for understanding employee behavior and workplace satisfaction. Within the tourism sector, motivated employees are more likely to provide better customer service, demonstrate organizational commitment, and contribute to long-term business sustainability.

Although international literature has extensively examined employee motivation and HRM practices in hospitality and tourism industries, limited research has focused specifically on Albania and the Balkan region. Existing studies mainly concentrate on tourism development and economic impacts, while issues related to employee wellbeing, motivation, job satisfaction, and HRM strategies remain underexplored.

This literature review aims to analyze the relationship between motivational theories and HRM challenges in tourism and agritourism, with a particular emphasis on the Albanian context. The article seeks to synthesize existing literature, identify major theoretical approaches, evaluate HRM practices, and highlight research gaps that require further empirical investigation.

The main research questions guiding this study are:

1. Which motivational factors influence employee performance and satisfaction in tourism and agritourism?
2. How do HRM practices affect organizational sustainability and employee retention in tourism businesses?
3. What are the main HRM challenges faced by Albania's tourism and agritourism sector?
4. What research gaps exist in the current literature regarding employee motivation and HRM in Albanian tourism?

The article is organized into several sections. Following the introduction, the methodology section explains the literature review process and selection criteria. The theoretical framework discusses major motivational theories relevant to tourism HRM. The literature analysis section examines international and Albanian studies concerning employee motivation, HRM challenges, and agritourism workforce management. The discussion section interprets the findings and highlights practical and theoretical implications. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the major findings and provides recommendations for future research and policy development.

Methodology

This study adopts a narrative and analytical literature review methodology aimed at synthesizing academic knowledge related to employee motivation and human resource management challenges in tourism and agritourism. Literature reviews play an important role in identifying theoretical developments, research trends, conceptual debates, and gaps within a specific field of study.

The literature search was conducted using several international academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink. These databases were selected because they contain peer-reviewed studies related to tourism management, hospitality, organizational behavior, employee motivation, and human resource management.

The review focused primarily on studies published between 2010 and 2025 in order to ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of the findings. However, classical theoretical works related to motivation theories were also included due to their importance in explaining employee behavior and organizational performance.

The search process involved the use of several keywords and combinations of terms, including:

- employee motivation in tourism;
- human resource management in hospitality;
- agritourism workforce;
- job satisfaction in tourism;
- employee retention in hospitality;
- tourism human capital;
- rural tourism employment;
- tourism HRM challenges;
- Albania tourism workforce;
- hospitality employee performance.

The inclusion criteria for selecting studies were the following:

- peer-reviewed journal articles;
- studies focused on tourism, hospitality, agritourism, or rural tourism;
- research related to employee motivation, job satisfaction, HRM practices, or employee performance;
- English-language publications;
- empirical studies, conceptual papers, and systematic reviews.

The exclusion criteria included:

- non-academic publications;
- studies unrelated to tourism or HRM;
- conference abstracts without full-text availability;
- duplicate publications;
- studies lacking methodological clarity.

After screening titles, abstracts, and full-text articles, the most relevant studies were selected for analysis. The literature was organized thematically according to major concepts such as employee motivation, HRM practices, workforce challenges, job satisfaction, employee retention, and rural tourism management.

The methodological approach emphasizes synthesis and critical analysis rather than descriptive summarization. Therefore, the selected studies were compared and evaluated in terms of theoretical frameworks, research methods, findings, and limitations.

Theoretical Framework

1. Employee Motivation in Organizational Contexts

Employee motivation refers to the psychological processes that influence the direction, intensity, and persistence of employee behavior in organizational settings. Motivation is considered one of the most important determinants of employee performance, organizational commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction.

In tourism and hospitality industries, employee motivation is particularly important because service quality depends heavily on human interaction and emotional engagement. Employees who are motivated are more likely to provide effective customer service, demonstrate positive attitudes, and contribute to organizational success.

Different motivational theories have attempted to explain why employees behave in certain ways and what factors influence workplace satisfaction and performance.

2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One of the earliest and most influential motivational theories is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow proposed that human needs are organized into five hierarchical categories: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. According to Maslow, employees are motivated to satisfy lower-level needs before pursuing higher-level psychological needs. In tourism organizations, physiological and safety needs include adequate salary, safe working conditions, and job security. Social needs involve teamwork and positive workplace relationships, while esteem needs relate to

recognition, promotion, and respect. Self-actualization refers to opportunities for creativity, personal growth, and professional development.

Maslow's theory remains relevant in tourism because employees often work under stressful conditions characterized by long hours, emotional labor, and seasonal instability. Organizations that address multiple levels of employee needs are more likely to improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover.

3. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors and motivational factors. Hygiene factors include salary, company policies, supervision, and working conditions. Although these factors do not necessarily create satisfaction, their absence may generate dissatisfaction.

Motivational factors include achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth. These factors contribute directly to employee satisfaction and motivation. Within tourism businesses, hygiene factors are essential due to the demanding nature of hospitality work. However, long-term employee commitment depends more strongly on motivational factors such as career opportunities, employee recognition, and empowerment.

Herzberg's theory highlights the importance of creating positive organizational environments where employees feel valued and supported.

4. Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan, differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in work because it is personally rewarding and enjoyable, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards such as salary or promotion.

SDT argues that employees have three basic psychological needs:

- autonomy;
- competence;
- relatedness.

When these needs are satisfied, employees experience greater motivation, wellbeing, and organizational commitment.

In tourism settings, intrinsic motivation may involve passion for hospitality, cultural interaction, and customer service. Extrinsic motivation often includes wages, bonuses, and job security. Studies indicate that intrinsic motivation is strongly associated with long-term employee satisfaction and service quality.

5. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

McGregor proposed two contrasting managerial assumptions about employee behavior. Theory X assumes that employees dislike work, avoid responsibility, and require strict supervision. Theory Y assumes that employees are self-motivated, capable of creativity, and willing to take responsibility.

Tourism organizations that adopt participative management approaches aligned with Theory Y are more likely to encourage employee engagement, innovation, and organizational commitment.

6. Equity Theory

Equity Theory suggests that employees compare their inputs and outcomes with those of others. Employees who perceive unfair treatment may experience dissatisfaction and reduced motivation.

In tourism industries, perceptions of inequality related to salary, workload, promotion opportunities, and recognition can negatively affect employee morale and productivity.

7. Job Satisfaction and Employee Performance

Job satisfaction refers to employees' emotional and cognitive evaluations of their work experiences. Research consistently demonstrates a strong relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance.

In tourism and hospitality industries, satisfied employees are more likely to provide high-quality customer service, maintain positive workplace relationships, and remain committed to the organization.

Employee performance in tourism includes:

- task performance;
- contextual performance;
- customer service quality;
- teamwork;
- adaptability.

HRM practices that support employee motivation and wellbeing contribute directly to improved organizational performance.

Literature Analysis

1. Employee Motivation in Tourism and Hospitality

The tourism and hospitality industry is characterized by intensive human interaction, emotional labor, and customer-oriented service delivery. Consequently, employee motivation plays a critical role in organizational effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

International studies indicate that motivated employees demonstrate higher productivity, stronger organizational commitment, and better service performance. Research conducted in hospitality businesses suggests that intrinsic motivational factors such as recognition, autonomy, professional growth, and positive workplace relationships are strongly associated with employee satisfaction.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of employee wellbeing in tourism industries. Tourism employees frequently experience stress due to long working hours, shift work, seasonality, and demanding customer interactions. Therefore, organizations that invest in employee wellbeing and supportive HRM practices are more likely to improve workforce retention.

Salary and financial rewards remain important motivational factors, particularly in developing economies. However, financial incentives alone are insufficient to ensure long-term employee commitment. Employees also seek meaningful work experiences, career opportunities, and supportive organizational cultures.

Research further demonstrates that transformational leadership positively influences employee motivation and organizational commitment in tourism organizations. Leaders who communicate effectively, recognize employee contributions, and encourage participation contribute to stronger workplace morale.

2. Human Resource Management Challenges in Tourism

The tourism sector faces significant HRM challenges worldwide. One of the most common problems is high employee turnover. Tourism jobs are often characterized by low wages, irregular working hours, seasonal employment, and limited career advancement opportunities.

Employee turnover negatively affects organizational performance because businesses must continuously recruit and train new employees. High turnover also reduces service quality and increases operational costs.

Another major challenge is labor shortages. Many tourism organizations struggle to attract qualified employees due to the demanding nature of hospitality work. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified workforce instability by accelerating employee migration toward alternative industries.

Training and professional development are essential components of strategic HRM. However, many tourism businesses invest insufficiently in employee training programs. Lack of training negatively affects service quality, communication skills, digital competencies, and customer satisfaction.

Technological changes and digitalization have also transformed tourism workforce requirements. Employees increasingly require ICT competencies, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability.

Diversity management represents another important HRM challenge. Tourism organizations often employ multicultural and multilingual workforces. Effective diversity management can improve creativity and customer service quality, while poor management may generate workplace conflict and dissatisfaction.

3. Rural Tourism and Agritourism Challenges

Rural tourism and agritourism have become increasingly important components of sustainable tourism development. These forms of tourism contribute to rural economic diversification, cultural preservation, and community development.

Despite their economic potential, rural tourism businesses face unique HRM challenges. Many agritourism enterprises are small family-owned businesses with limited managerial expertise and financial resources. Consequently, formal HRM practices are often absent.

Seasonality remains one of the most significant challenges in rural tourism. Businesses frequently rely on temporary or seasonal employees during peak tourism periods. Seasonal employment reduces job stability and negatively affects employee commitment.

Another challenge concerns the lack of professional training opportunities in rural areas. Employees may possess practical experience but limited formal education in tourism management, hospitality, or customer service.

Infrastructure limitations and rural depopulation also affect workforce availability. Young people often migrate toward urban centers or abroad in search of better employment opportunities.

Sustainable agritourism development therefore requires investments in education, vocational training, infrastructure, and employee development.

4. Human Resource Management in the Albanian Tourism Sector

The tourism industry has become one of Albania's most important economic sectors. Tourism contributes significantly to employment generation, foreign investment, and regional development.

During recent years, Albania has experienced substantial growth in international tourism arrivals and hospitality investments. Rural tourism and agritourism initiatives have also expanded due to increasing interest in authentic cultural and natural experiences.

Despite this positive development, Albania's tourism sector continues to face serious HRM challenges. One of the most critical issues is the shortage of qualified employees. Many tourism businesses report difficulties in recruiting skilled workers, especially during peak summer seasons.

Migration represents a major factor contributing to labor shortages. Many young Albanians seek employment opportunities abroad due to higher salaries and better working conditions.

Informal employment is another challenge affecting the tourism workforce. Informality reduces job security, limits employee rights, and discourages long-term professional commitment.

The lack of vocational education and professional training also negatively affects service quality. Although tourism education programs have expanded in Albania, many employees still lack practical skills related to hospitality management, communication, customer service, and digital technologies.

Furthermore, strategic HRM practices remain underdeveloped in many tourism businesses. Recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and employee motivation systems are often implemented informally.

Research related to employee motivation in Albanian tourism remains limited. Existing studies mainly focus on tourism development, destination competitiveness, and economic impacts rather than workforce management and employee wellbeing.

5. Employee Performance and Organizational Sustainability

Employee performance is strongly influenced by organizational culture, leadership style, workplace relationships, and HRM practices.

Studies consistently demonstrate that organizations investing in employee motivation and development achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction and organizational sustainability.

Performance management systems, employee recognition programs, and continuous training contribute positively to employee engagement and productivity.

Within tourism organizations, employee performance directly affects customer experiences and destination reputation. Poor employee motivation may result in low service quality, customer dissatisfaction, and negative organizational outcomes.

Sustainable tourism development therefore requires sustainable workforce management practices. Tourism businesses must create supportive work environments that encourage employee wellbeing, professional growth, and organizational loyalty.

Discussion

The findings of this literature review demonstrate that employee motivation represents one of the most important determinants of organizational success within tourism and agritourism industries. Motivated employees contribute positively to service quality, customer satisfaction, organizational commitment, and business sustainability.

The analysis indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence employee behavior in tourism organizations. Extrinsic factors such as salary, job security, and working conditions remain particularly important in developing economies characterized by economic instability and seasonal employment. However, intrinsic factors including recognition, autonomy, career development, and positive workplace relationships play a critical role in long-term employee satisfaction and retention.

The reviewed literature further suggests that strategic HRM practices significantly improve organizational performance. Tourism organizations that invest in employee training, communication, leadership development, and performance management are more capable of attracting and retaining qualified employees.

In the Albanian context, the tourism sector faces substantial workforce-related challenges. Labor shortages, migration, informal employment, and insufficient vocational education negatively affect service quality and organizational sustainability.

Rural tourism and agritourism enterprises experience additional difficulties due to limited financial resources, family-based management structures, and seasonal demand fluctuations.

Theoretical implications of this study involve the integration of motivational theories with tourism HRM practices. The reviewed theories provide valuable frameworks for understanding employee behavior and organizational dynamics within hospitality industries.

Practical implications include the need for tourism businesses and policymakers to invest in:

- vocational education and training;
- employee wellbeing programs;
- performance management systems;
- career development opportunities;
- sustainable HRM strategies.

The review also identifies several research gaps. Empirical studies examining employee motivation, job satisfaction, and HRM practices within Albania's tourism sector remain limited.

Future research should therefore focus on:

- quantitative analyses of employee motivation;
- comparative regional studies;
- employee retention strategies;
- sustainable HRM models;
- digital transformation and workforce adaptation.

Longitudinal studies examining changes in employee attitudes and organizational practices over time would also contribute significantly to the existing literature.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the relationship between motivational theories and human resource management challenges within tourism and agritourism, with particular attention to the Albanian context.

The findings demonstrate that employee motivation significantly affects organizational performance, customer satisfaction, employee wellbeing, and workforce retention. Motivational theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Equity Theory provide important conceptual frameworks for understanding employee behavior in tourism organizations.

The tourism sector faces persistent HRM challenges including labor shortages, high turnover, seasonality, informal employment, and insufficient professional training. These challenges are especially visible in developing economies and rural tourism destinations.

In Albania, tourism businesses continue to experience workforce instability due to migration, limited vocational education, and inadequate strategic HRM implementation. Agritourism enterprises face additional managerial and structural difficulties associated with seasonality and limited financial resources.

The study concludes that sustainable tourism development requires sustainable workforce management practices. Tourism organizations must prioritize employee motivation, professional development, fair working conditions, and strategic HRM policies.

The article contributes to the academic literature by synthesizing theoretical and empirical perspectives related to employee motivation and HRM challenges in tourism. It also highlights important research gaps that require future empirical investigation within the Albanian tourism context.

Future studies should explore employee motivation using quantitative and mixed-method research approaches while examining the effectiveness of HRM strategies in improving employee retention and organizational sustainability.

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