

TOWS matrix in agritourism development: A comprehensive strategic study in the former Quang Binh province

Thi Thao Do^{1*}, Minh Thuy Mai Thi^{1, 2}

¹School of Hospitality and Tourism, Hue University, 22 Lam Hoang Street, Vy Da Ward, Hue City, Vietnam

²An Giang University, Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City, 18 Ung Van Khiem Street, Long Xuyen Ward, An Giang Province, Vietnam

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Abstract:

This study develops a phased, resilience-oriented strategic framework for agritourism development in the former Quang Binh province, Vietnam, using evidence collected before the 2025 administrative reorganisation. Adopting a qualitative case-study design, the study applies a TOWS matrix to supply-side evidence from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 13 agritourism owners/managers and four local officials. The data were analysed across five dimensions: physical capital and site carrying capacity; human capital; social capital; market access capability; and sustainability, resilience, and seasonality. The findings reveal a central tension: abundant agricultural and cultural resources and strong community cohesion coexist with weak inter-business linkages, limited tourism and marketing capabilities, restricted access to capital and technology, pronounced seasonality, and high exposure to natural hazards. The TOWS analysis proposes a phased roadmap that prioritises defensive and capability-building measures Strengths - Weaknesses - Threats/Weaknesses - Opportunities (WT/WO), followed by resilience-oriented adaptation Strengths - Threats (ST), product diversification, destination branding, and market expansion Opportunities (SO). The study contributes to agritourism research by highlighting the gap between community cohesion and formal business cooperation and by integrating resilience and seasonality into strategic planning. The framework may also support policymakers and practitioners in strengthening agritourism capabilities, collaboration, and sustainable market development in comparable resource-constrained destinations.

Keywords: agritourism, Quang Binh province, resilience, seasonality, strategic planning, TOWS matrix.

Classification numbers: 2.1, 2.2

1. Introduction

Agritourism has emerged in Vietnam as a key strategy for promoting rural sustainability, generating income, and preserving local cultural values [1, 2]. Contemporary agritourism models, built around authentic farm-based experiences, organic production, local cuisine, and connections with ecotourism, are attracting an increasing number of visitors and creating new livelihood opportunities, including for women and low-income households [3-7]. By providing employment, supplementary income, and contributing to rural economic restructuring, agritourism is recognised as an important driver of local socio-economic development [8, 9]. In particular, the integration of “One commune one product” (OCOP) products with rural tourism has diversified tourism offerings, from speciality foods to place-based cultural experiences, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of many Vietnamese destinations [10, 11]. Moreover, the

integration of agriculture and tourism not only promotes economic growth but also supports environmental protection and the preservation of rural cultural identities [1, 2, 7, 12]. Recent studies emphasise that social and economic conditions, such as community involvement, production capacity, human resources, infrastructure, and digital market access, play a decisive role in shaping agritourism development. E-commerce platforms help farmers access information and expand product distribution channels, while investment in transport and tourism-related services (restaurants, accommodation, and rest stops) enhances accessibility and the visitor experience [13]. In the context of rural economic restructuring and the global expansion of agritourism, it has therefore become urgent to move beyond spontaneous, fragmented initiatives and to systematically analyse internal supply-side factors, particularly infrastructure, institutional capacity, and community social capital, as the basis for designing sustainable agritourism development models.

*Corresponding author: Email: dtthao@hueuni.edu.vn

Empirically, agritourism development at the selected sites in Bo Trach and Le Thuy districts of the former Quang Binh province remained fragmented. Fieldwork was conducted from February to April 2024, before Vietnam's 2025 administrative reorganisation; thus, "the former Quang Binh province" denotes the pre-2025 administrative setting of the study sites rather than province-wide coverage. Despite rich natural and cultural resources, local operators faced infrastructure deficits, limited tourism and marketing capabilities, and high vulnerability to natural hazards. This study conceptualises the resulting tension as an "agritourism paradox": strong community cohesion and interpersonal trust coexist with weak horizontal business linkages, limiting collective value chains, joint marketing, and coordinated resilience planning. Although prior research highlights community participation, this coexistence remains underexamined. However, a significant gap in current research is that these factors are often analysed in isolation, merely listed in impact factor analyses, or examined only within policies developed using the traditional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) matrix [8, 14-16]. Existing research still rarely integrates these factors into a staged strategic framework that provides a sequential, prioritised roadmap for development. This gap poses a challenge for policymakers and agritourism enterprises in emerging, resource-constrained destinations, which often lack practical guidance on which interventions to prioritise for maximum impact. Moreover, resilience and other development-related factors are usually treated as contextual conditions rather than as core elements of strategic design.

This study expands the theoretical frontiers of strategic analysis by integrating the TOWS matrix into a resilience-oriented supply management framework, an aspect that has often been overlooked in previous agritourism studies. Instead of applying this matrix as a descriptive tool for the current situation, the study proposes a new methodological approach: arranging strategies into a series of adaptive responses to external shocks. Its primary objective is to identify and analyse the factors shaping agritourism development in the former Quang Binh province and to develop a comprehensive strategic framework for optimising resource use and promoting sustainable agritourism growth. In doing so, this study repositions TOWS from a simple diagnostic tool to a powerful planning tool, specifically tailored for destinations with high environmental risks. The research aims to answer three research questions:

- RQ1. What concrete supply-side constraints and enabling conditions shape agritourism development in the former Quang Binh province?

- RQ2. How can the coexistence of strong community cohesion and weak inter-business cooperation be interpreted in an emerging agritourism destination?

- RQ3. How can a resilience-oriented TOWS framework translate these conditions into a phased strategic roadmap for agritourism development?

The study adopts a supply-side perspective, drawing on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with agritourism managers, owners, and local officials responsible for policy and regulatory support. The findings are expected to advance theoretical understanding of agritourism development and offer practical guidance on policies and strategies for other regions with similar agritourism potential, both within the country and globally.

2. Literature review and analytical framework

To evaluate agritourism destinations, this study develops a framework that combines five supply-side dimensions: physical, social, human capital, market access, and sustainable resilience. These factors go beyond a typical literature review by providing structured criteria to assess both internal capabilities and external adaptability. This systematic approach directly applies the TOWS matrix, shifting the research focus from simple description to a resilience-oriented strategic planning framework.

2.1. Analytical dimensions of agritourism development

2.1.1. Physical capital and site carrying capacity

Physical capital, a core factor in economic development and business management research, includes tangible assets such as equipment, machinery, infrastructure, and other assets with economic value [17]. For agritourism businesses with limited resources, a lack of capital creates difficulties in investing in infrastructure and expanding services, which, in turn, affects their ability to attract tourists [1, 18]. The development of agritourism businesses, such as homestays, requires substantial investment in both physical capital and financial resources [19]. In addition to financial resources, agritourism products depend on appropriate infrastructure that facilitates development and attracts tourists. Factors such as abundant agricultural resources, scenic beauty, diverse agricultural products, and local cultural ties are crucial for the development of agritourism [20]. The transportation system, infrastructure, and service quality enhance the experience, fostering tourists' satisfaction and loyalty [21]. Within this study, site carrying capacity is considered in relation to the adequacy of transport, infrastructure, and service facilities, which shape a site's ability to accommodate visitors effectively [17]. Technical infrastructure is considered one of the key factors

influencing agritourism development, as it supports service delivery and enhances destination accessibility [1]. Similarly, investments in infrastructure and resource development have also been emphasised to ensure connectivity and convenience for tourists [17].

2.1.2. *Social capital*

Social capital refers to the relationships, networks, and factors such as trust, cooperation, and community norms that enable individuals or groups to achieve economic and social benefits [22]. Social capital significantly influences development motivation, cooperation capacity, and community participation, particularly in the context of developing agritourism [17]. Local participation is crucial in connecting tourism with the community, creating unique cultural experiences, and providing accommodation services. Integrating local culture with agricultural production creates attractive tourism products that enhance the value of tourists' experiences [7]. Cooperation between businesses, households, and local authorities helps develop diverse tourism products and optimise resources. Furthermore, government support enhances businesses' capacity, enabling them to access preferential policies and develop sustainable services [23]. Another aspect of human capital in agritourism is the building of social networks and relationships within the local community. Strong social capital helps mobilise resources and promote cooperation among stakeholders, thereby supporting the development of agritourism [18, 24].

2.1.3. *Human capital*

Human resource development supports the improvement of marketing strategies and the management of agritourism activities. Previous studies have shown that education and training programs in rural areas often lead to higher agricultural productivity and improved agritourism experiences, thereby promoting sustainable growth [13, 25]. Human capital is defined as the collection of knowledge, skills, experience, and abilities possessed by an individual or group, which in turn creates economic and social value [22]. A skilled labour force provides better services, contributing to enhanced tourist experiences [26]. On the other hand, management and business skills help households and businesses develop sustainable strategies, optimise resources, and increase profits [22, 27]. Human resource quality, particularly service competence and agritourism knowledge, plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' experiences. Training local communities further contributes to the development of a professional service workforce capable of effectively meeting tourists' needs [21, 28].

2.1.4. *Market access capability*

Market access refers to the ability of products and services provided by businesses and producers to reach end consumers. This involves not only the distribution of goods but also factors such as market information, geographical proximity, government support services, and product quality [29]. The connection between agricultural producers and tourism businesses can create more diverse and attractive tourism products, thus attracting tourists. When local agricultural products are easily accessible to the market through tourism businesses, tourists have the opportunity to experience the production process firsthand and enjoy the products directly at the source [4]. Additionally, the demand for sustainable tourism and unique cultural experiences, along with direct market access from the community to tourism, will add value and enhance the quality of the experience [30].

2.1.5. *Sustainability, resilience and seasonality*

The sustainability and resilience of agritourism are key factors for its long-term development, impacting both economic viability and environmental integrity [31]. Agritourism accommodations that prioritise local agricultural products and sustainable practices enhance resilience in the face of global competition. Sustainability in agritourism encompasses environmental, economic, and social aspects without harming local land or ecosystems [32]. The resilience of agritourism farms is also related to the diversification of services, including accommodation and tourism activities, which significantly contribute to the farms' resilience in mountainous regions [33, 34]. Additionally, diversifying farming methods can provide supplementary income, helping to mitigate economic instability. Seasonal fluctuations in agricultural activities and visitor demand can also affect revenue stability and operational continuity. Sustainable agritourism activities can turn crises into growth opportunities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many agritourism businesses adapted by shifting to direct sales to consumers, demonstrating their flexibility and innovation [35]. Building networks and fostering relationships among agritourism operators is crucial for sharing information and distributing resources, thereby strengthening resilience.

2.2. *TOWS-based framework*

The strategic roadmap derived from the TOWS matrix may also be interpreted as reflecting coordination challenges within a complex multi-actor system. Recent research on computational and evolutionary game models in the energy and clean production sectors indicates that cooperative and competitive strategies can develop endogenously under resource and environmental constraints [36, 37]. These approaches highlight the

co-evolution of cooperation and competition under resource constraints, which aligns with the context of agritourism development, as viewed in this study as the result of cooperation within competition among local factors. Based on the literature reviewed above, this study does not treat the theoretical section as a formal causal theory, but as an analytical framework for qualitative inquiry. Our approach is conceptually aligned with that perspective in interpreting agritourism development as arising from strategic interactions and cooperation in competition among heterogeneous actors [38].

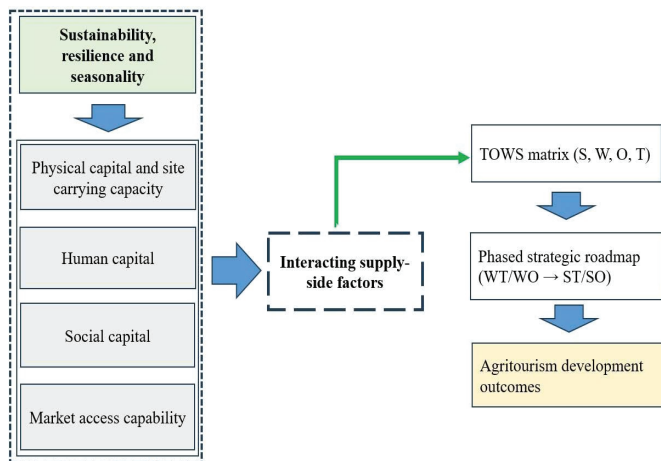


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for a TOWS-based approach to agritourism development. Source(s): Author's own creation/work. Note: WO (Overcoming), WT (Defensive), ST (Resilience-oriented), and SO (Offensive).

Five dimensions were used to organise the interview guide and coding process: physical capital, including site carrying capacity; human capital; social capital; market access capability; and sustainability and resilience, including seasonality and climate-related disruptions. These dimensions capture the principal resource, coordination, market, operational, and adaptive conditions shaping agritourism development in emerging destinations. Fig. 1 summarises how these dimensions are linked to the TOWS procedure. Empirical evidence from interviews and field observations was first coded into internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats; these themes were then synthesised into phased strategic options (WT, WO, ST, and SO).

3. Research methods

3.1. Characteristics of the research area

The empirical setting comprised purposively selected agritourism sites in Bo Trach and Le Thuy districts, which were administratively part of Quang Binh province at the time of fieldwork. Despite possessing abundant agricultural resources and a distinctive cultural heritage,

agritourism development in the study area remains fragmented and constrained by shortages of capital, technology, and tourism-related skills. As one of Vietnam's disaster-prone regions, the area requires a strategic approach that integrates resilience with sustainability. Although located along the North-South transport corridor, its relative distance from major regional transport hubs, such as Phu Bai and Vinh airports, creates accessibility barriers by increasing travel time and costs for visitors. These characteristics make the former Quang Binh Province a suitable empirical setting for developing a systematic and resilience-oriented agritourism strategy.

3.2. Research design, sampling, and data collection

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine how supply-side conditions shape agritourism development in the former Quang Binh province [39]. The significance of these factors was interpreted based on their thematic salience, consistency across interviews, and perceived influence on agritourism development and sustainability. To achieve this goal, the primary data collection method is semi-structured, in-depth interviews, employing purposive sampling to enable deep, multidimensional exploration through a flexible set of open-ended questions focused on relevant topics [27]. Following the research approach of Patton [40], the study sample was purposively selected to optimise contextual diversity and data depth. It comprises participants with over two years of experience, distributed across key study sites in this area and representing both business and state management perspectives. This method has proven effective in exploring detailed, complex issues that can only be revealed through direct exchange [41, 42]. The main participants include agritourism managers and owners, as well as local officials directly involved in operating agritourism models. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby interviews were ceased when the collected data began to repeat, and no new information emerged [43]. In this study, saturation was observed after the 13th interview with agritourism managers/owners, as themes began to repeat without yielding novel insights. This finding aligns with methodological recommendations in qualitative research, which suggest that a sample of this size is generally sufficient to achieve thematic saturation in relatively homogeneous groups [44]. This approach provided adequate depth while avoiding redundancy. The interview questions were developed through a theoretical overview and field observations in the area, focusing on factors influencing agritourism development. Drawing on the theoretical framework and expert consultations, the semi-structured questionnaire focuses

on interviewees' profiles, key capitals (physical, human, and social), market access, and sustainable adaptive capacity. Before conducting the interviews, the research team also carried out four-day observation trips to compare the actual context with interview data and consulted five experts (including researchers, lecturers, and policy management officers) to gain deeper insights and refine the research tools.

The research process was conducted in two stages. First, the semi-structured interview guide was reviewed and pilot-tested with five purposively selected experts. The experts had at least three years of relevant professional experience and expertise in tourism, agritourism, agriculture, community development, cultural conservation, or local tourism policy. They were also involved in research, teaching, tourism management, or policy formulation. Their feedback was used to improve the clarity, relevance, sequencing, and contextual appropriateness of the interview questions. These experts were not included in the main study sample. Second, formal interviews were conducted with two purposively selected participant groups. Agritourism owners/managers were eligible if they were directly involved in operating an agritourism establishment and had at least two years of relevant experience. Local officials were selected for their involvement in tourism, agriculture, or local economic development, and for their knowledge of local policies and development priorities. The final sample comprised 13 agritourism owners or managers and four local officials. Interviews with owners/managers continued until the later interviews yielded no substantively new themes (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Group	Informant type	Number of informants	Informant code
G1	Agritourism managers or owners	13	M01, M02, M03, M04, M05, M06, M07, M08, M09, M10, M11, M12, M13
G2	Local officials	4	L01, L02, L03, L04
Total		17	

Source(s): Author's own creation/work.

The authors, academic tourism experts unaffiliated with site management, adopted measures to minimise subjective bias. These included strict adherence to a single semi-structured guide for all interviews and a consensus-based approach to data analysis, in which coding discrepancies were resolved through frequent group discussions and consultations. All interview content was transcribed with participants' consent, and participants were given the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their interview transcripts or summaries before analysis. To protect participants' privacy and identities, all personally

identifiable information was anonymised during data processing and presentation. The coding process combined deductive methods, based on the theoretical framework of adaptive resources and capacities, with inductive methods to identify new elements from practice. To ensure reliability, two researchers independently coded the data and discussed their findings to reach a consensus on the codebook. The data were then manually synthesised using systematic comparison matrices, resulting in five core themes and sub-themes that reflect the specificities of the local context.

4. Research results

4.1. Demographic characteristics

Table 2. Demographic profile (N=17).

No.	Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Sex	Male	10	58.82
		Female	7	41.18
2	Age (years)	<35	2	11.76
		35-45	9	52.94
		>45	6	35.29
3	Education	High school and vocational college	5	29.41
		University	9	52.94
		Postgraduate	3	17.65
4	Seniority (years)	<3	4	23.53
		3-5	8	47.06
		>5	5	29.41
5	Job Position	Manager	4	23.53
		Owner	9	52.94
		Local official	4	23.53

Source: Author's own creation/work.

Table 2 shows that the interview sample is predominantly male (58.82%), aged between 35 and 45 (52.94%), and has three to five years of work experience (47.06%). The proportion of individuals under 35 years of age is low (11.76%), and 29.41% have completed only high school or vocational college. The majority are owners (52.94%) and hold a university degree (52.94%). The sample reflected a range of demographic and professional backgrounds, although most participants were aged 35-45, held a university degree, and had three to five years of relevant experience. This profile provided perspectives from participants with practical involvement in agritourism operations and local governance.

4.2. Factors affecting the development of agritourism

The results of the analysis in Table 3 present the factors that directly influence the development of agritourism, as identified from participants' responses. These factors offer valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and barriers associated with its development.

The results indicate that participants possess a profound understanding of the roles and strategies associated with factors such as access to capital, technological innovation, local policies, infrastructure development, and community involvement. However, limited access, external factors, and difficulties in securing capital and management capacity are affecting agritourism development. The research results reveal a significant gap between awareness and implementation capacity. Specifically, many interviewees recognised the importance of workforce training (M01-M04), yet a shortage of skilled labour in tourism emerged as a recurring concern across the interviews (M04, M06, M08). Similarly, awareness of sustainable development and environmental protection was consistently expressed, but the ability to invest in green technologies and recover from natural disasters remained constrained by high costs (M04; M07-M13). Seasonal fluctuations in agricultural activities and visitor demand also contributed to unstable revenue and disrupted operational continuity (M03, L02). This indicates that agritourism operators recognise the necessary steps to improve quality and promote sustainable growth, but are held back by financial and human resource constraints (L01-L04). Conversely, material resource barriers have been identified as a major factor affecting development. Difficulties in accessing investment capital emerged as a common concern across interviews, resulting in inadequate infrastructure and equipment (M03-M07, M13).

Limited infrastructure and service capacity also restricted the number of visitors that establishments could accommodate without compromising service quality or environmental conditions (M07, L01-L04). This situation directly constrains the provision of high-quality services and the quality of the tourist experience, ultimately reducing establishments' competitiveness. Additionally, limited proximity to major regional airports hampers accessibility, exacerbating structural weaknesses in physical infrastructure and market penetration for agritourism providers (M05, M11, L01, L03). Furthermore, strong relationships with the government and close community connections emerged as important advantages across the interviews, particularly in helping establishments access information and support programmes. Conversely, interviewees pointed to complex administrative procedures and weak coordination and cooperation among businesses as key obstacles that reduce effectiveness and limit opportunities for collective growth (M03, M09, M13). This reveals a paradox: while there is a vertical connection (with the government), the horizontal linkages (among businesses) remain weak. A major issue is the strategic weakness in market access capabilities. The interviews also revealed a recurring weakness in market access, as many establishments still lacked a well-organised and effective marketing strategy and continued to rely heavily on traditional word-of-mouth promotion. Although interviewees generally recognised the importance of social media, the use of online marketing

Table 3. Factors affecting the development of agritourism in the former Quang Binh province.

No.	Factor	Advantages	Difficulties	Impact on the development of agritourism
1	Physical capital and site carrying capacity	Some establishments have invested in modern technology and upgraded their infrastructure, improving service efficiency	Difficulties in accessing investment capital, infrastructure, and equipment remain. Limited visitor-handling capacity, particularly in relation to access, parking, sanitation, accommodation, and service facilities	Hinders the provision of high-quality services and the enhancement of the tourist experience
2	Human capital	Some establishments have recognised the importance of workforce training and invested in it, improving service quality. There is an abundant labor force with experience in agricultural production activities	Lack of skilled labor in tourism, limited communication, and customer service skills. Not formally trained through accredited courses	Limits the ability to serve tourists, impacting their satisfaction and experience
3	Social capital	Good relationships with the government and strong community connections help in accessing information and support programs	Complex and prolonged administrative procedures, limited cooperation between establishments	Creates development opportunities, but administrative procedures and lack of cooperation reduce effectiveness and investment opportunities
4	Market access capability	Some establishments have used word-of-mouth channels and are clearly aware of the importance of promotion on social media platforms. Some have online tour booking channels	Lack of effective marketing strategies, relying on word-of-mouth, and limited use of online marketing	Creates opportunities to develop new markets, helping agritourism establishments reach a more diverse customer base, enhance brand recognition, and increase product value on digital platforms. This, in turn, drives revenue growth, improves service quality, and contributes to the sustainable development of agritourism
5	Sustainability, resilience and seasonality	The natural environment and pristine ecosystems are core assets, and some establishments have adopted environmentally friendly technologies	The investment cost in environmentally friendly technologies is high, and the ability to recover from natural disasters is limited. Seasonal fluctuations in agricultural activities and visitor demand result in unstable revenue and weather-dependent operations	Although environmental protection is a priority, the risks posed by natural disasters and the high investment costs present significant challenges to achieving sustainable development

Source: Author's own creation/work.

remained limited. This promotional gap constrains agritourism products' ability to reach broader domestic and international markets, despite their potential (M04, M06, M11). The analysis indicates that agritourism development in the former Quang Binh province has significant potential but is impeded by numerous barriers related to capital, technology, and recovery solutions.

Research indicates that resilience depends on a combination of resources rather than a single factor. Practice shows that adaptive capacity and management skills (human capital) can optimise performance even with limited infrastructure (physical capital). Conversely, a lack of management capacity diminishes the effectiveness of physical investments. Therefore, the simultaneous integration of different types of capital is crucial to responding to fluctuations.

4.3. Strategic groups derived from the TOWS matrix

The findings derived from the TOWS matrix provide a systematic basis for formulating strategic orientations for agritourism in the former Quang Binh province through the alignment of internal capabilities and constraints with external opportunities and environmental pressures. The analysis identifies four principal strategic orientations: WO (Overcoming), WT (Defensive), ST (Resilience-oriented), and SO (Offensive). As illustrated in Table 4, these orientations are organised into a sequential strategic roadmap that reflects different stages of agritourism development. The initial stage emphasises WT strategies, which aim to minimise existing vulnerabilities and mitigate potential external risks. This is followed by WO strategies designed to address internal limitations while taking advantage of favourable external conditions. The subsequent implementation of ST strategies seeks to strengthen adaptive capacity and enhance resilience in response to changing environmental and market pressures. Finally, SO strategies represent a more proactive growth orientation, whereby existing strengths are leveraged to facilitate market expansion, product diversification, and the enhancement of the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the agritourism sector. The results indicate that the WO strategy group promotes a foundational approach, utilising opportunities from government support policies (O2) and cooperation trends (O3) to address inherent weaknesses in capital, human resources, and business linkages. Conversely, the WT (Defensive) strategy group advocates the most basic solutions, considering limited internal resources and the effects of natural factors such as storms, floods, climate change, and other extreme weather conditions. These include strengthening initial linkages (WT1) and standardising core operating procedures (WT2), reflecting a bottom-up development approach that requires consensus and trust from Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) towards the government. Businesses must also develop contingency plans and prepare for changes caused by natural factors

(T1) and resource shortages (W1, W2, T3). The ST strategy group shifts its focus to developing "resilient-adaptive" agritourism models that utilise indigenous resources and promote community cohesion to tackle climate-related threats. Finally, the SO strategy group represents the ideal development goal by creating distinctive agritourism products based on local agricultural and cultural resources, anticipating evolving market trends and the increasing demand for authentic, experience-based, and sustainable tourism. This demonstrates that these four strategic groups outline the roadmap for agritourism development at each stage in the former Quang Binh province.

5. Discussion

5.1. Capability-building and resilience: Insights from the TOWS analysis

The TOWS analysis and synthesis reveal that agritourism development in resource-limited contexts within this research area follows a necessary evolutionary trajectory rather than simultaneous expansion (Table 4). This strategic structure suggests that the accumulation of internal capabilities is a crucial prerequisite for successful external market penetration. Specifically, the prominence of WO strategies implies that emerging destinations must first leverage institutional support and collaborative networks to address structural shortages in capital and skills. Without strengthening this foundation, aggressive market expansion efforts may not be sustainable. The findings of this study support prior evidence on inefficiencies in resource sharing in emerging tourism destinations [45]. Furthermore, while local communities exhibit strong consensus on cultural values, entrepreneurial activity is constrained by a local competitive mentality and a perceived risk of unequal returns. This contradiction is not unique; it reflects a common feature of transitional rural economies in which traditional social institutions have not yet adapted to the demands of a market economy. This study extends previous findings by showing that the main barrier lies not in stakeholders' unwillingness to cooperate, but in the lack of bridging organizations that facilitate coordination among them [46]. The absence of effective cooperatives or shared digital platforms has kept collaborative efforts at a spontaneous and non-commercial level, suggesting that future policy interventions should shift their focus from merely providing physical capital to creating institutionalised collaborative spaces. This approach aligns with studies on the development of agritourism in developing countries, which identify the lack of capital (W2) and human resource skills (W1) as the greatest barriers [47-49]. Therefore, the proposal for training programmes and preferential credit packages (WO1) is not only a temporary solution but also a step towards addressing capital issues. This result highlights the strategy of establishing (WO2) to address the lack of business linkages (W3), a strategy supported by previous studies, which suggest that

cooperation in business and shared support groups is crucial for the growth of small enterprises [50, 51]. One significant finding of this study is that the WO strategy addresses the paradox of agritourism, where social capital and community connections are strengths, yet business linkages are lacking.

Establishing an association is a solution for transforming social capital into economic capital, thereby supporting the development of agritourism in the former Quang Binh province. On the other hand, the WT (Defensive) strategy group proposes the most basic solutions, considering the limited internal resources and the impact of natural factors such as storms, floods, climate change, and extreme weather. These require linkages (WT1) and the standardisation of basic operational processes (WT2), reflecting a bottom-up development approach that requires unity and trust from small and medium-sized business households to the government. Enterprises need to have contingency plans and be prepared for changes caused by natural factors (T1) and resource shortages (W1, W2, T3). Once the internal foundation has been strengthened, more aggressive and proactive strategies can be effective. A highlight of this study is that the ST strategy group makes a novel contribution by emphasising resilience as a strategic pillar. Instead of viewing climate change (T1) as

merely a threat, the ST1 strategy proposes using strengths in indigenous resources (S1) and community cohesion (S3) to build adaptive agricultural models and promote a “resilient-adaptive” destination. Previous studies have demonstrated the power of the community in agritourism development, highlighting its role in management and support in agritourism activities [6, 7]. This approach goes beyond traditional analyses and aligns with new research directions in sustainable tourism, emphasising the importance of integrating resilience and risk management into business strategies [50-52].

The former Quang Binh province is one of the provinces in Vietnam most affected by natural disasters [53]. The research results suggest a potential impact on destination development, in which communities and nature work together to transform weaknesses into strengths, creating attractive and distinctive destinations. Finally, the SO (Offensive) strategy group represents the ideal target for development. The strategy of developing specific products based on agricultural resources (S1) and culture (S3) to anticipate market trends (O1) is consistent with previous research findings on agritourism experiences, emphasising authentic experiences, immersion in nature, and the development of unique tourism products from indigenous

Table 4. TOWS matrix strategy for developing agritourism in the former Quang Binh province.

	Strengths - S	Weaknesses - W
External	S1: Rich and distinctive agricultural resources. S2: Local government support and facilitation. S3: Diverse local culture and a close-knit community.	W1: Lack of skilled labour with expertise in tourism. W2: Difficulties in accessing capital and modern technology. W3: Lack of cooperation and linkages between business establishments. W4: Limited infrastructure and relative remoteness from major regional airports (Phu Bai, Vinh), which increases travel time and costs for visitors.
External		
Opportunities - O	SO Strategy (Offensive) SO1: <i>Develop distinctive, high-quality agritourism products.</i> Combine agricultural resources (S1) and local culture (S3) to create unique experience tours (e.g., organic farms, farm-to-table culinary tours, and farming experiences) to capitalise on the trend of experiential tourism (O1). SO2: <i>Build a unified brand and strong communication strategy.</i> Leverage government support (S2) to create the “Quang Binh Agritourism” brand, widely promote community-based tourism models (S3) to attract investment and tourists (O2, O3).	WO Strategy (Overcoming) WO1: <i>Enhance capacity and modernise infrastructure.</i> Leverage support from government policies (O2) to offer training and skill-building programs for local workers in tourism (addressing W1). Develop preferential credit programs to help households and businesses easily access capital for technology and infrastructure investment (addressing W2, W4). WO2: <i>Establish an Agritourism Association/Network.</i> Take advantage of collaboration opportunities (O3) and government support (O2) to form a joint organisation that promotes linkages, shares experiences, creates shared tour routes, and addresses the lack of cooperation (W3).
Threats - T	ST Strategy (Resilience-oriented) ST1: <i>Build a sustainable and resilient agritourism model.</i> Leverage local resources (S1) and community engagement (S3) to develop agricultural models that adapt to climate change (e.g., drought-resistant and flood-tolerant crops). Create communication stories about the community's resilience and efforts to protect the environment to attract eco-conscious tourists (addressing T1, T3). ST2: <i>Diversify products and markets.</i> Utilise cultural diversity (S3) and government support (S2) to develop tourism products that are not weather-dependent (e.g., culinary tourism, traditional crafts, cultural workshops) to minimise risks from natural disasters (T1) and differentiate in the market (T2).	WT Strategy (Defensive) WT1: <i>Build core capacity and small-scale linkages.</i> Focus on addressing basic weaknesses by starting with small linkages. Establishments can organise internal training sessions together (addressing W1), share resources and equipment (addressing W2), and create a small joint fund for emergency responses to natural disaster risks (addressing T1, T4). WT2: <i>Standardise processes and strengthen risk management.</i> Develop basic operational procedures for customer service and environmental sanitation. Create simple disaster prevention plans at the grassroots level, while also requesting technical support from the government to enhance response capabilities and environmental protection (addressing W1, W4, and responding to T3, T4).

Source: Author's own creation/work.

culture, local cuisine, and organic farm experiences [3, 53-54]. However, compared to developed tourist destinations, new agritourism destinations in the former Quang Binh province are still limited in terms of capacity, connectivity, and professional tourism resources, which are major weaknesses of agritourism establishments (W1, W3). These constraints may intensify during peak periods, when visitor demand places additional pressure on infrastructure and service capacity, whereas low-season demand may lead to unstable revenue and operational disruptions. Therefore, the SO strategy cannot be implemented independently but must result from an internal consolidation process among other strategic groups. To develop long-term and sustainable agritourism destinations in such a resource-limited and seasonal context, a phased approach is essential. This journey must begin with enhancing business competitiveness and improving the quality of local services through resource optimisation and strengthened management. Additionally, priority should be given to establishing effective linkages, particularly in community-based tourism, fostering public-private partnerships, expanding markets, and connecting with organisations and associations. Such linkages can support coordinated seasonal product development, marketing, and visitor-flow management. These supporting strategies provide a solid foundation for market penetration while establishing mechanisms for preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. Integrating capability building, seasonal adaptation, market development, and resource protection may provide a useful basis for strengthening the resilience, adaptability, and sustainability of the agritourism system.

5.2. Theoretical contributions

This research contributes new theoretical insights to agritourism and rural development, centred on three core perspectives

Firstly, this study goes beyond the traditional SWOT analysis method by contributing a phased strategic framework. Instead of listing individual strategies, the study develops a growth roadmap, from strengthening the foundation and defence (WT, WO) to offence and market expansion (ST, SO). This model is suitable for tourism destinations with limited resources, especially in the early stages of development, as it helps optimise resources and minimise the risks associated with fragmented development.

Secondly, the study highlights resilience as a core strategic factor rather than merely a barrier. In the context of this research, which frequently faces natural disasters and climate change, this study contributes by integrating a recovery strategy into the TOWS matrix alongside the challenge (T4), transforming it into an opportunity within the ST strategy and suggesting the creation of a distinctive and attractive destination image. This finding offers a new perspective, moving beyond traditional analyses that

typically focus on resources, capital, markets, and human resources in agritourism [55].

Thirdly, the study identifies an important paradox in emerging agritourism destinations: the juxtaposition of strong community cohesion with weak business cooperation. Findings indicate that limited inter-business collaboration contributes to fragmented development and weak integration across destinations. Specifically, interviews revealed that, despite a strong sense of community, the lack of formal cooperation mechanisms, such as trade associations or joint marketing initiatives, has hindered the formation of a cohesive agritourism network. To address this issue, this study proposes institutionalisation strategies for cooperation, including promoting public-private partnerships and creating of platforms for business networking.

5.3. Practical contributions

Beyond the practical boundaries of this research context, the proposed TOWS matrix offers a flexible strategic planning model for diverse agritourism ecosystems. Its reliance on generalised core supply factors including physical, human, and social capital, market access, and resilience ensures its relevance across various domestic and international contexts. In Vietnam, the framework is tailored to regions by focusing on policy opportunities (e.g., OCOP) and addressing environmental threats to overcome infrastructure and workforce constraints [10, 56]. On a global level, the model is applicable to developing economies, emphasising ST strategies to address instability, and to European contexts such as Romania and Poland, where it aligns SO strategies with innovation and sustainability [31, 57]. Ultimately, scalability challenges are mitigated through pilot testing and iterative qualitative assessments.

This finding implies that the resilience of agritourism units in climate-sensitive areas requires a shift from passive response to strategic adaptation. A key issue to address is the restructuring of business models to decouple revenue from fluctuations in pure agricultural production through value-added activities, such as workshops and on-site retail. In addition to upgrading physical infrastructure to withstand natural disasters, businesses must incorporate sustainable practices into their operations to achieve ecological balance. Moreover, long-term sustainability is secured by institutionalising community support networks and establishing specialised financial safety measures. Currently, successful adaptation models worldwide provide valuable lessons regarding resilience. Research by C. Valdivia, et al. [52] in the Andean highlands of Bolivia demonstrates that integrating service diversification is a crucial mechanism for mitigating climate risks and preserving ecological capital. Meanwhile, cooperatives have served as intermediaries to promote post-hurricane recovery through regenerative farming practices. Research has shown that

a well-coordinated recovery strategy is a prerequisite for advancing sustainable agritourism. Given the critical need for such a coordinated strategy, we offer the following managerial and policy implications to guide the sustainable transition of the local agritourism ecosystem.

Firstly, policymakers and local authorities should adopt a phased approach to optimise economic development interventions. The priority strategy should focus on strengthening the internal capacities of economic entities (human and financial capital). Only once a solid foundation is established should policies shift to the phase of market expansion and integration.

Secondly, for business owners, the shift from a competitive mindset to a cooperative development approach is key to promoting sustainability. Instead of focusing solely on individual benefits, businesses should recognise that cooperation will create shared value and expand development opportunities. This study suggests that addressing limitations in market access capability requires adopting an integrated marketing communications strategy focused on online presence. Businesses should shift from a siloed approach to consistent brand management, utilising multimedia content and online review platforms to engage with the market and establish a collaborative destination marketing mechanism. Through a centralised digital platform, cross-promotion efforts among stakeholders will help form tourism value chains that transform individual products into synchronised experiential journeys, thereby effectively attracting both domestic and international customer segments.

Thirdly, for the local community, it is essential to leverage collective strength to actively participate in environmental protection efforts and develop risk-prevention plans. Resilience should become an integral part of the local tourism identity and the destination's unique appeal.

6. Conclusions and future research directions

6.1. Conclusions

This study develops a systematic strategic roadmap based on the TOWS matrix to harness the potential of agritourism in the former Quang Binh province and other emerging tourism destinations. By thoroughly analysing supply-side factors, the study confirms that agritourism development is governed by a paradox: abundant potential in resources and culture, coupled with strong community ties, is constrained by foundational weaknesses in capital, human resources, and marketing capabilities. The key contribution of this study is the proposal of a phased strategic framework that moves away from fragmented thinking. Rather than relying on isolated solutions, the study supports a logical progression from development and internal capacity building, creating a foundation for expansion and breakthrough phases to ultimately establish a sustainable

and distinctive agritourism destination. With resilience and adaptation as its core factors, this model is suitable for local contexts with limited resources and significant vulnerability to crises, natural disasters, and climate change.

This research emphasises the importance of linkages, the formation of intersectoral associations, and cooperation as core strategies for policymakers, tourism business owners, and local communities. These contributions are not only valuable from a theoretical standpoint but also offer practical implications, helping other regions apply the agritourism model towards sustainability. Although developed from empirical data, the research findings provide a TOWS strategic roadmap that may extend beyond the scope of a single case study. Organised around core supply variables and a sequential transition from defence (WT/WO) to offence (ST/SO), this analytical framework is a versatile mechanism adaptable to larger agritourism ecosystems. Specifically, in destinations with abundant resources and strong institutional capacity, the initial stage can be condensed, enabling a reallocation of resources towards product specialisation, innovation, and the coordination of regional clusters. Consequently, this model should be viewed as a transfer template with a fixed overall structure, while specific actions should be tailored to the development level and governance context of each locality.

6.2. Limitations of the study and future research directions

Firstly, the study focuses on the former Quang Binh province, so the findings may not fully reflect other agritourism destinations. In particular, the study reflects the pre-2025 administrative context at the time of data collection. Future research should revisit the area under the new administrative structure and compare it with other regions to assess the proposed strategic roadmap's broader applicability.

Secondly, the study primarily relied on in-depth interviews with 17 purposively selected participants, including 13 agritourism owners/managers and four local officials. While the interviews provided detailed contextual insights, the relatively limited sample size and predominantly supply-side focus may not fully reflect the perspectives of all relevant stakeholder groups. The findings should therefore be interpreted within the specific study context. Future research could broaden both the sample size and composition to include tourists, local residents, farmers not engaged in tourism, and tourism intermediaries.

Thirdly, this study has several methodological limitations. Relying on qualitative data introduces subjectivity into interpretation, and the sample's homogeneity, which focuses mainly on management, limits the generalisability

of the results. The absence of quantitative surveys also restricts data triangulation. Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches to enhance empirical reliability, incorporate diverse stakeholder perspectives (e.g., tourists, local authorities), and conduct comparative analyses across regions at varying levels of development to identify universal success factors. Additionally, future studies should employ a mixed-methods approach to statistically validate qualitative findings on business resilience and collaboration strategies and use cluster analysis to compare regions with varying development levels and identify key success drivers.

Fourthly, applying resilience modelling (e.g., system dynamics or agent-based modelling) is recommended to simulate adaptive behaviours under environmental and economic volatility, offering a predictive framework for sustainability in vulnerable contexts.

CRedit author statement

Thi Thao Do: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing original draft; Minh Thuy Mai Thi: Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing, Reviewing & Editing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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