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Agroecological Transitions Through Youth Education: The Adapted Role of Third Places in Rural Vojvodina

Abstract: This paper examines how third places in rural Vojvodina can be adapted into informal educational hubs for youth-focused agroecological learning. By analysing key agroecological themes of organic farming, short-value chains, and circular economy in their local context, the paper explores their expected economic and social impacts when delivered through local and community-based learning spaces. The conceptual model argues that third places can strengthen youth engagement, support income diversification, and contribute to community cohesion. The focus point is placed on the economic and social dimension of rural development. The findings suggest that informal education has potential to support youth led local development, although its full effects depend on broader structural conditions such as advisory services and financial support.

Keywords: Agroecology, Rural Economy, Third Places, Informal Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a natural science that relies on natural resources to produce yield. With the scale of growing needs for food production, environmental and biological impacts, conventional large scale agricultural practices rely on the use of pesticides, organic and mineral fertilizers, irrigation systems, meticulous seed selection, as well as crop rotation. These global pressures are also visible in regional contexts such as Vojvodina, where agricultural sustainability intersects with local demographic and economic challenges. With the ecological issues of today, and the need for more sustainable agriculture and innovations, agroecological practices gain significance.

While not seeing rural decline as severe as the southern parts of the country, Vojvodina region still has issues with youth migration and as a consequence of it, an ageing population. There are opportunities for: further development of multifunctional agriculture, diversification of rural household income, innovation in sustainable production, and creation of opportunities for youth (*Regional Spatial Plan of the AP of Vojvodina until 2020*, 2011). This is where youth should be highlighted as an important factor of further development. Sustainability that both agroecology and rural development in general imply should be led by future generations. There is space for innovations and changes in rural areas, and it is important that in this process, the youth are not just bystanders and receivers, but active participants.

The term “third place” comes from it being a place most often visited by individuals, right after home (“first place”) and work or school (“second place”) (Oldenburg, 1997, p.1). The essence of third places lies in the social role they hold in local communities, they are the grounding and roots that keep the community alive. Oldenburg also discussed on the “vanishing” of third places in our digitalised and globalised modern society. Rural areas are also not immune to the changes in our society. This is the reason there is a growing need for physical spaces that are multifunctional, particularly in rural areas that are facing social challenges.

The main question that this study deals with is: How informal education of youth about agroecological practices, conducted within the informal setting of rural “third places”, can contribute to a more sustainable agriculture and to economic resilience in Vojvodina? In this context, third places are imagined beyond their social role, they are adapted to fit the modern needs of rural and agroecological realities. In this sense, third places are imagined as spaces for informal education on agroecological topics. This kind of educational model would fit the local context and reality of rural Vojvodina, as well as have potential benefits for economic, social and ecological standing of rural areas, targeting all three dimensions of rural development.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a qualitative and conceptual research approach. First, relevant literature on agroecology, third places, and informal education was reviewed to identify key themes and establish a theoretical basis for the conceptual model. This study relies on literature-based synthesis, where findings from diverse strands of research were integrated to identify overlapping principles and research gaps to be built upon.

Second, data on agroecological and demographic situation of Vojvodina were researched in order to present the reality and emerging needs of the rural areas in the region. After establishing the regional context, educational themes from the field of agroecology are presented through a thematic categorisation. This was performed in order to organise the reviewed literature and contextual data on local associations, good practices, and initiatives, into coherent educational themes that represent a part of the proposed third-place model.

Finally, a model of youth-centered educational third places was developed within the discussion section. In developing the model, a conceptual analysis was applied to connect existing theoretical insights with the identified needs of rural youth in Vojvodina. The proposed model was then created through conceptual modelling, involving theoretical concepts adapted to local contexts of Vojvodina. The discussion section further interprets how the proposed educational model could generate economic and social effects in rural areas. These impacts are framed as expected outcomes based on the literature-informed model rather than as verified empirical results. The focus of the study remains centered on the economic and social dimensions, and environmental impacts are implied.

Given the qualitative and conceptual nature of the study, the research focused on identifying relationships between concepts rather than generating measurable or empirically tested outcomes.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Third places

In the Oldenburg sense third places are “nothing more than informal public gathering places” (Oldenburg, 1997, p.1). Third places in their traditional sense do not create a community, they allow it to exist by bringing the people together in a physical location. From the highlighted functions, the social element is clearly visible. In his book, The Great Good Place, Oldenburg (1999) delved deeper into the matter of what these places are and what they represent for the community. Third places are presented as unifying, leveling, inclusive and entertaining, and the main activity is the conversation of participants.

In their true form, third places emerge in local cafés, libraries, and community centres (Littman, Milligan, Berry, Holloway, & Scott, 2024, p.128). An argument of third places as catalyst of societal participation and educational justice links third places with public libraries (Thiele & Klagge, 2021, p.36). Libraries as a third places are mentioned as places of non-formal education, that is often overlooked. Libraries in this context are a good example of how public spaces can foster the social elements of third place as well as informal educational content. This leaves space for further insights into how adapting the educational content according to the local needs can help close the educational gaps and benefit the local area. While all of the listed places are discussed in their local context, most of the studies revolve around third places in cities as urban hubs of modern day challenges. While urban areas have a plethora of accessible places that have the potential to foster third place atmosphere, rural areas are faced with limited infrastructure, and therefore limited opportunities.

On a positive note, this gap allows for innovative solutions to rural challenges. Professor Christopher Ryan is actively researching and developing his concept of third places that are adapted to the modern society. In his series of webinars, he discusses the importance of such spaces as solutions to emerging business and societal issues. One of the main arguments he presents is that for the sense of community to develop, physical spaces must be created to foster such social structures, and they also require activities that motivate individual to engage with them. Ryan also highlights the importance of sustaining the engagement by enriching third places with the element of play. By adding the additional entertainment factor (other than conversation as main activity), these adapted third places develop identity that is allowing them to be more competitive. Increasing the competitiveness of third places is crucial when it is taken into consideration that they are competing with any other activity an individual can be doing other than engaging with them (Chris Ryan Studio, n.d.). Professor Ryan’s work allows for further discussion on how such unique and innovative take on third places can be implemented in context of Vojvodina’s rural reality.

3.2. Agroecology in rural development

The term agroecology is comprised of two disciplines, agronomy and ecology (Wezel et al., 2009, p.504). It is defined as application of ecology in agriculture. Agroecology can be further defined as either a scientific discipline, movement or practice. From the definition of agroecology it is clear that its integral part is agricultural practice, as well as its impacts on the environment and economy. Agriculture is the main economic activity in many rural areas, therefore, agricultural practices directly influence the state of rural economy. When discussing agriculture in context of rural development, multifunctionality of agriculture is highlighted (Wezel & Jauneau, 2011, p.16). Multifunctionality in context of rural development means that agricultural practices should possess a dimension of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The ecological sustainability implies rational use of natural resources, preserving rural ambient, and improving the quality of natural resources (Đurić, Vukoje, & Miljatović., 2021, p.615). In certain areas, this connection appears as environment conservation in agroecosystems, the aforementioned multifunctionality of agriculture, short-value chains and increased income for farmers (Wezel & Jauneau, 2011, p.20). The clearest tie of agroecology and rural development is its goal to contribute to sustainable agricultural practice (Gallardo-López, Hernández-Chontal, Cisneros-Saguilán, & Linares-Gabriel, 2018, p.7), and incorporating it into sustainable rural development.

Despotović (2023), in her monography, argues that the prerequisite to ecologically responsible behaviour is the existence of awareness on the subject. Further, the monography author mentions that there are numerous research that indicate that “higher level of education (both formal and informal) positively correlates to a more developed ecological awareness" (Despotović, 2023, p.59). The author went on to prove this claim within her research, concluding that the farmers with higher education levels were more ecologically aware, as well as that the ones who had formal education within the agricultural studies, showed higher levels of awareness. Despotović (2023) here proved that there is a clear connection between the level and type of education to ecological awareness. These findings open up the question of is there space for informal education models within the sphere of agroecological practices, and how can they influence not only the environment, but also the economy of agricultural practices.

Direct connection between agroecology and its economic potentials has been represented in a study by Ploeg et al. (2019) that incorporated agroecological practices and economic implications in various farms across Europe. This study presented empirical data on agroecological practices from European farms, and from this, some key economic potentials are concluded. The economic potentials listed below are synthesized from the comparative analysis provided by Ploeg et al. (2019), who reviewed multiple empirical studies across Europe.

Economic Potentials of Agroecology (synthesized from Ploeg et al., 2019):

1. Income stability and resilience
2. Lower production costs and reduced dependence on external inputs
3. Higher viability of small-scale farming
4. Local market development and value-added processing
5. Employment creation through labour-intensive sustainable models
6. Autonomy, higher product quality, and improved resource management
7. Innovation and learning networks among farmers

The study by Ploeg et al. (2019) holds immense value in highlighting economic benefits from successful agroecologic farming practices. An obstruction with applying such practices in farms across Vojvodina would be the difference in availability of financial subsidies. This however, should not represent a constraint for future research in possibility of applying such agroecological models in Serbia.

Across the reviewed literature, a persistent constraint on agroecological development is the lack of knowledge, skills, and training, both among current farmers and among youth who could participate in agricultural innovation. Although economic potentials are evident, their realization requires human capital capable of adopting new practices. This highlights the importance of targeted learning, community-based education, and youth engagement, which the next section explores.

3.3. Agroecological informal education

Because the topic of this study deals with community based informal learning on agroecological topics, it is important to view the elements of community and informal learning in the realm of science. As one of the definitions of agroecology is that it is a science discipline, certain bridges must be made between professional scientists and people whose life and work is in the field of agriculture. Such connection is made in order to aid knowledge sharing and entice participation on locally relevant topics. The term “citizen science” represents science which involves people who are not professional scientists dealing with topics of scientific nature (Roche et al., 2020, p.1). Learning within the citizen science projects can take place in a formal or informal setting, and as such, can be the translator of scientific approaches in agroecology to local rural communities. Authors Roche et al. (2020), within their study, highlighted other research that shows how citizen science should encourage active roles within community, and through focusing on specific topics, empower people for responsibility. Agroecological education also requires group work, communication skills development, and introducing the ability to transfer theoretical knowledge to real life problems. Such approach to education can be applied through open-ended case studies that apply knowledge of learners to solve real life agroecological issues within their communities (Francis, Jordan, Porter, Breland, & Lieblein, 2011, p.7).

A study from Tanzania found that capacity building is crucial for agroecological adoption (Gayo, Lwankomezi, & Katonge, 2025, p.10). Training programs and participation in agroecology groups were identified as valuable for developing skills and awareness through education and participation. Findings of this study concluded that integration of entrepreneurship was impactful among youth, however, financial constraints represented an issue. This study from Tanzania also reported that “by increasing economic agency, youth were empowered to lead sustainable change” (Gayo et al., 2025, p.19). Youth already possess valuable knowledge on agroecology in local context, but lack structured pathways for skill expansion and income diversification.

Taken together, existing research highlights that informal, experiential, and community-rooted educational approaches are essential for advancing agroecological transitions. Youth emerge as a particularly important group, with local knowledge, motivation, and economic potential to contribute to sustainable change when provided with accessible learning opportunities. These insights justify examining rural third places as potential sites for informal agroecological education, knowledge exchange, and community development.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Context of Vojvodina

4.1.1. Agroecological conditions

Vojvodina is a predominantly flat lowland region. Its position within the Pannonian Plain, combined with an extensive river network, contributes to fertile soils and favorable agroecological conditions. The climate is mild continental, which supports diverse agricultural production. Agricultural land in Vojvodina amounts to approximately 1.7 million hectares, this means that 73% of the region represents arable land surfaces (*Regional Spatial Plan of the AP of Vojvodina until 2020*, 2011, p.23). Together with agricultural non arable fertile land, the area amounts to around 90% of Vojvodina's total area. Most of agricultural area consists of average family owned farms, average size of 3.9 hectares per plot of land. Soil quality is generally high, and with the mentioned high share of arable land, it is the region's major comparative advantage.

However, the region is also faced with climate change and unsustainable practices that threaten agroecological potentials of the fertile land (*Regional Spatial Plan of the AP of Vojvodina until 2020*, 2011, p.74). If not dealt with, further pollution, inefficient environmental monitoring practices, and the existing degradation of natural resources is undermining future opportunities for sustainable development.

4.1.2. Demographic characteristics

In this paper, rural youth are defined as individuals aged 15–29. This range aligns with common youth classifications in rural development policy frameworks and includes adolescents shaping future livelihood decisions as well as young adults entering agricultural and community roles.

In 2022, 2,562,221 residents lived in rural areas of Serbia. In Vojvodina's rural regions, the population was 664,394, including 102,086 young people aged 15–29 (Statistical Office of The Republic of Serbia, 2023). Average population density in Serbia is 86 persons per km², while rural areas have a median density of 32 persons per km² (Drobnjaković & Kokotović Kanazir, 2025, p.42). Some rural settlements in Vojvodina have extremely low densities below 20 persons per km². Within the 15-29 age group, 37.2% live in rural areas of Vojvodina (Statistical Office of The Republic of Serbia, 2023). This aligns with lower population density of rural areas, and high concentration of youth in cities.

The Census from 2022 confirmed ongoing population decline, which was primarily driven by low birth rates (Nikitović, 2025, p.24). In addition to this trend, Serbia and its rural regions are dealing with negative migratory trends. Region of Vojvodina has experienced intensive youth outmigration to foreign countries. Key migratory trends of youth in Serbia include outmigration of young and educated population and the rise of regional migrations, with high concentration of youth in the Belgrade region (Devedžić & Šobot, 2025, p.103).

These dynamics are even more pronounced in rural areas, where youth leave for educational and employment opportunities, contributing to ageing rural communities and shrinking of rural labour forces. Without re-engagement of young people, these demographic trends limit long-term development potential. A part of this trend may be attributed to limited awareness of opportunities beyond conventional agriculture.

4.1.3. Emerging needs

If the needs of rural regions are put in context of developing more sustainable practices within agriculture and rural economies, there is an opening for developing youth-focused informal education programs on sustainable agriculture. In this sense, rural population could benefit from community spaces where learning, collaboration, and local innovation can take place. By bringing these two needs together, a basis for exploration of informal education as a catalyst for agroecological transition among rural youth is created.

Although improvements must be made in order to gain economic benefits from application of agroecological practices, there is plenty of space for innovative solutions to bridge conventional practices to sustainable ones. However, these opportunities cannot be pursued if negative demographic trends persist. If youth continue to outmigrate and leave rural areas, low birth rates and ageing of rural communities will only worsen. In addition to changes in population, economic impacts do not have a positive prognosis with current trends. Rural areas are in need of young people who are economy drivers and contributors, and their exit leads to economic stagnation. Without targeted action, these trends may deepen the rural decline.

4.2. Educational themes for rural youth

4.2.1. Organic farming basics and pathways to conversion

In 2024, Serbia recorded 710 certified organic producers (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, n.d.). In Vojvodina, approximately 4,627 hectares (31.2% of Serbia's total organic area) were under certified organic plant production, while an additional 2,175 hectares (17.2%) were in the conversion period, amounting to a total of 6,802 hectares, or 24.69% of Serbia's organic production. The largest organic crop areas in the region include wheat, sunflower, and fodder pea. Vojvodina also contributes 39.5% of Serbia's total organic animal production.

These figures show that organic production is present but still underdeveloped relative to the region's potential. Vojvodina's organic cluster (VOC) is an association of organic producers based in the region, and is working on development and promotion of agroecological practices. They are actively developing projects and bringing together not only producers, but also research institutions and other participants of the sector. VOC has made it their mission to support innovations, sustainability and competitiveness of the sector. This kind of association that currently counts 32 member producers (Vojvodina Organic Cluster, n.d.), is an example of how connecting can be meaningful and impactful for the development of agroecological practices. Through their projects they did not only work on agroecological side of organic farming, but also dealt with topics of citizen science and knowledge exchange. Success of VOC in their projects and aim speaks on willingness of the agricultural sector and beyond to network, share knowledge, and innovate agroecological practices.

Knowledge-sharing could be crucial for small farmers, young members of agricultural households, and rural youth who may be interested in organic farming but lack clear entry points. This is where youth-focused workshops within informal setting come in useful. By taking the rural youth through regulations, certification steps, and examples from the region, they become aware of possibilities for organic production. By grounding these workshops in local examples and successful practices in Vojvodina, rural youth gain a realistic idea of what organic conversion entails, along with social benefits.

Awareness would need to be met with adequate financial support and connecting with associations such as VOC. In this sense, informal education delivered through accessible community spaces can serve as a starting point for youth who want to explore organic agriculture but need guidance, mentorship, and a local "anchor" where ideas can be developed. Because of Vojvodina's existing but still growing organic sector, simple introductory workshops can help youth identify realistic entry points into environmentally responsible and potentially profitable agricultural practices.

4.2.2. Small-scale processing and short-value chains

Many farms already process their products for the needs of their own household. Common processed products are jams, pickled vegetables, meat products, herbal goods, and honey. Many farmers have already developed their processing business and have built a brand for their agricultural household. With the popularity rise of online shopping that is readily available, "Small food producers in Serbia" is bridging the gap between urban needs for hand made food products with small scale producers from all over Serbia. Currently, in this online community, there is more than 70 registered small producers from Vojvodina (Small Food Producers in Serbia, n.d.). Producers of this online platform offer: processed plant, meat, and crop products, as well as herbal and honey products to consumers from all over Serbia. Consumers, however, do hold a certain degree of reluctance when it comes to online purchases of local produce in short-value chains, as they do not have the possibility of tasting and proof of quality (Janković, Zekić, & Trkulja, 2025, p.64). This once again highlights the importance of physical spaces for small producers. The existence of this kind of virtual market shows the real and growing demand for small-scale processed products, promoting community values and bringing back the monetary values to the place of origin. It also presents the need for having local physical spaces for their promotion.

A research by Janković et al. (2025) based in Vojvodina's administrative district of Srem, confirmed that consumers possess awareness and interest in local produce. Participants of this study were mostly of opinion that by purchasing local products, they are "encouraging development and sales of traditional products", as well as that they "expect for the state and local self-government to encourage development and sales of local traditional products" (Janković et al.,2025, p.61). This empirically supports the argument that there is a growing interest in locally produced and processed products, as well as the need for financial support from the government.

Financial support plays an important enabling role to the development of local produce chains. With financial subsidies for increasing the volume of this type of processing, farms can increase value of their products and diversify their income. Calls for subsidies are regularly posted, and the last one for financial means for investments aimed at increasing value through processing ran through March and April of 2025 (Regional Secretary for Agriculture, Water Management, and Forestry, 2025). This call had the goal of co-financing new equipment for production and processing of meat and milk, production of wine and fruit spirits, fruits and vegetables, and other agricultural products. These kinds of subsidies are relevant for youth who are a member or owner of a family farm business. By receiving financial aid they have more freedom and possibility to pursue start of processing of their products.

While financial incentives are essential, small-scale processing practices may benefit from more local awareness raising on possibility of such practice or fostering ideas on what final products could be made. Youth-focused workshops can bridge this gap by raising awareness of available subsidies, showcasing good practices, and helping young people explore what types of products could be developed based on local resources. Such workshops would not only encourage micro-entrepreneurship but also strengthen the principle of "keeping local value local," support rural cultural identity, and reinforce the economic dimension of agroecological transition.

4.2.3. Circular economy on family farms

Circular economy represents a concept in which resources are reused. Goal of circular economy is to renew natural resources, keep the materials in use and prolong the life span of products. European Union has been leading the development and implementation of this concept with numerous documents, reviews, and directives. Many EU member states have developed their strategies or road maps for transitioning to circular economy model. Serbia, as an EU candidate country, has developed a road map of its own. This road map is described as a "living document" with a goal to identify good examples in practice and give recommendations for next steps on the road to transition (Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). In context of agricultural production road map for Serbia discusses reduction of food waste, promotion of organic production, and building stronger connections between actors in the sector, topics that are tied to agroecological principles and to the context of family farms.

Possibilities for application of circular economy model in agriculture have been discussed in context of production of wine, beer and fruit spirits by Environment Engineering Group (2022). Within their study, Environment Engineering Group (2022), presented different ways circular economy can be amplified within the realm of food production. In addition to efficiency, recycling, and waste management, the authors emphasize the importance of sustainable raw material use and stronger support for local economies, which are crucial for small-scale and family-run farms attempting to adopt agroecological principles. By transforming by-products into valuable inputs, farms strengthen their resilience and reduce dependence on external resources.

An example of application of circular economy model on farms is a project funded by the Government of Switzerland in partnership with PUC "Srbijavode", titled "EU for Green Agenda in Serbia". This project was conducted within "Gralo" LCC that represents an innovative agricultural model organised according to the principles of circular economy. The farm managed to reduce the amount of waste water by installing wastewater treatment from accommodation facilities. This water was used to irrigate green areas and trees used for production of biomass. The biomass was further processed into energy pellets (EU for Green Agenda in Serbia, n.d.). Some other actions focused on innovative solutions for circular economy within the agricultural sector under EU for Green Agenda in Serbia project are "Recycling of Irrigation Pipes" and "Turning Paper Waste into Organic Fertiliser and Poultry Bedding" funded by the EU, both of which represent low-cost, practical ideas relevant for small producers.

For youth in rural areas, especially those involved in family farms, understanding the core principles of circular economy and seeing concrete examples of good practice is a meaningful way to strengthen the long-term sustainability of agricultural households. That is what these chosen examples of projects focused on circular economy are meant to demonstrate, showcasing what can be done so that the waste is reused, costs are cut, and value increased. Integrating circular economy ideas with agroecological methods can empower young farmers to create diversified, resilient, and economically stable farming systems. These practices, such as reducing waste, reusing local resources, and connecting with other rural actors, offer young people realistic and innovative ways to modernize family farms while promoting environmental and community values.

5. DISCUSSION

With proper planning and design, traditional third places could be adapted to become the learning hubs of local communities. While keeping the good conversation, informal atmosphere, and other key elements of a third place, along with addition of informal education elements fit for local context, these spaces could become local drivers of change. By encouraging local innovation and community led development, third places as educational youth hubs have the potential to be the key element of sustainable and resilient rural societies of Vojvodina.

Although it is important where the adapted third places are set and how they look like, the educational content and other activities are what essentially motivates participants to engage with them. This is where informal education methods and the concept of citizen science come in to create non-formal and participatory learning that motivates youth to stay engaged. By organising practical demonstrations of agroecological practices, hosting open-ended studies, and other experiential methods of informal education, participants would be able to apply their existing knowledge to specific local cases. This type of citizen science approaches would allow for delivery of agroecological topics that are not only in local context, but also directly dealing with local issues. Educating the youth on agroecological topics such as organic farming, short-value chains, and circular economy in a farm context, rural areas of Vojvodina are likely to benefit from positive economic impacts. Building on the positive economic impacts presented by Ploeg et al. (2019), certain benefits of agroecological practices could be connected to educational themes presented in this paper. This discussion interprets the conceptual model by connecting its educational components with the expected socio-economic outcomes identified in the literature.

Education on agroecological themes in an informal setting of third places is likely to bring out the economic impacts of the mentioned sustainable agricultural practices themselves. For organic agriculture, connected economic impacts are related to access to new markets of organic produce and better market prices. This means that the youth who are educated on this topic possess knowledge that enables them to access to new markets and a chance to increase their farm income. When discussing economic impacts of farm processing and short-value chains, it may be expected for these practices to increase and diversify the income of producers. Whether it is creation of a processed produce brand or new ideas on what to produce, third places enriched with informal education models are likely to channel creative thinking of youth. With their social and educational aspect, these physical spaces for rural youth have the potential to create an environment for networking and acting as a hub of innovative business ideas.

In addition to gaining more monetary value, young farmers might be interested in learning more about sustainable ways to cut production costs. Reduction of production costs can be amplified by application of circular economy principles on family farms, that is discussed as one of the agroecological educational themes in this paper. Delivery of information on this theme can focus on reduction of waste that can induce decrease of external inputs, higher energy efficiency, and autonomy by self-provisioning of certain inputs. For reduction of both cost and waste to be possible, farmers should be aware of practices and principles of circular economy, this is where third places as informal education points come in to deliver the educational content in local context. These expected economic effects stem from the conceptual model presented in this paper, assuming that third places successfully function as ongoing hubs of youth-focused agroecological education.

Discussing impacts in the social dimension of rural development, it is expected that creation of educational third places for rural youth would help tackle some of the demographic challenges that rural areas in Vojvodina are faced with. Further, creating third places as educational hubs for youth in rural areas may increase attractiveness of rural life, possibly slowing migration. For this to work, other needs of rural population, such as better infrastructure and availability of services must be met. As for full economic potential of agroecological practices, they cannot be obtained just by enhancing educational structures in rural areas. The concept of informal education on agroecological practices must be met with proper financial support, as well as agricultural and ecological advisory services. This would allow for rural population, especially youth, to be not only aware and inspired to act, but have the financial means and technical support through the process. This highlights that the economic impacts discussed here remain conditional on the environment that enables them, not only on the educational function of the adapted third places.

Overall, the discussion shows that the adapted third place-model primarily demonstrates its potential through expected economic and social impacts, which were the main focus of this paper. While environmental benefits, such as reduced waste or improved ecological practices are inherently linked to agroecological education, they remain implied outcomes rather than developed themes in this discussion section, given the scope and focus of the paper. The arguments presented here therefore highlight how informal, youth-centered learning spaces could contribute to local economic diversification, community resilience, and youth empowerment in Vojvodina, while acknowledging that these effects depend on broader structural support. This positions the adapted third places as a promising, though still conceptual tool for strengthening rural development through agroecological learning.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper focused on the exploration of how informal, youth-centered agroecological education delivered in rural third places can contribute to sustainable agriculture and economic resilience in Vojvodina. By analysing three agroecological themes of organic farming, short-value chains, and circular economy practices, the study highlighted concrete pathways for youth to diversify income, access new markets, and lower production costs. The demographic analysis provided reasoning for innovative solutions to challenges such as persistent youth outmigration and ageing of the rural population, which threatens the local development.

The discussion linked the educational content to expected economic outcomes documented in European agroecology research, such as income stability, reduced input dependence, and the creation of innovative business ideas. However, the paper also emphasized that these benefits are dependent on external support, such as targeted subsidies and improved rural infrastructure. If left without this external support, full potential of the modeled informal education is not realistically achievable.

From this, certain policy implications are synthesized and recommended:

1. Allocation of funds to community centers to host third places in rural areas.
2. Designing subsidies that target youth-led agroecological transitions specifically.
3. Fostering network strengthening between existing associations within the sphere of agroecology, rural youth, and municipal authorities to sustain citizen-science projects and peer learning.

The listed policy implications are focused on using existing funds of municipal authorities, co-financing agroecological endeavours of rural youth, and building on existing networks and associations.

While the proposed third-place model is intentionally exploratory and has not yet been field tested, this limitation is acknowledged as a basis for future pilot research. A practical next step would be to launch a pilot workshop coordinated by local NGOs, Vojvodina Organic Cluster, educational institutions, and other associations and networks fitting to the context of the model. Future research should also focus on funding possibilities for development of pilot projects in rural settlements of Vojvodinas. In addition to creation of the proposed third place model, youth engagement rates and quantifiable economic impacts should be documented. This kind of an empirical validation will clarify how informal education can become a tangible lever for agroecological transition and rural revitalisation in Vojvodina.

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