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Urban vs. rural: Contrasting environmental concerns and sustainable practices in the Romanian HoReCa sector

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Abstract. This research questions the alignment of economic objectives with environmental management in the Romanian hospitality, restaurant and café (HoReCa) sector, with a focus on sustainable development. It juxtaposes the sector's sustainability imperatives in urban and rural settings, and discusses adaptation and resilience mechanisms against an increased global focus on environmental conservation. The sector's transition to sustainable development as a strategic imperative is examined. The urban-rural dichotomy reveals contrasting challenges: urban units face consumer-driven competition, while rural units face resource constraints and infrastructure deficits. Empirical studies suggest that regional development has a complex impact on the economic and environmental contours of the sector. The study uses a structured Likert scale questionnaire to measure environmental attitudes and practices within the sector. Data from companies were analysed using SPSS, revealing urban-rural differences in environmental commitment. Hierarchical roles within firms further delineate divergent perceptions of environmental action. The findings suggest an educational gap on environmental issues within the sector, coupled with a recognition of the urgency of more profound environmental action. The data also reflect scepticism about the current effectiveness of recycling and waste management, with varying perceptions of environmental threats. The research argues for stratified, context-specific sustainability interventions that take into account the diverse environmental perceptions of the sector and the specific socio-economic realities of Romanian localities.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Urban-Rural Dichotomy, Romanian HoReCa Sector, Environmental Attitudes

1. Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable development in the Romanian hospitality, restaurant and café (HoReCa) sector involves a complex interplay between economic performance and

environmental responsibility. This assessment critically contrasts the sector's environmental principles and sustainability pathways in both urban and rural settings, and provides a framework for analysing the sector's capacity for adaptation and resilience. In the context of an increased global emphasis on sustainability, Romanian HoReCa sector entities must navigate the integration of environmental management with economic objectives - a dual imperative that is essential yet challenging in today's context of heightened environmental awareness.

At the heart of this balancing act is the notion of sustainable development - a concept that has moved from peripheral concern to core business strategy. For Romania's HoReCa sector, sustainability is no longer an optional accolade, but a fundamental aspect that is intertwined with the very fabric of operational success. Băbăţ et al. (2023) have critically examined the Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Index, highlighting its usefulness in scrutinising and strengthening the sustainability aspect of tourism ventures. Through their work, one discovers the compelling need for benchmarks that not only measure but also drive performance, especially in the dynamic interplay of urban and rural HoReCa environments.

This urban-rural dichotomy reveals different profiles of environmental concerns and sustainable adaptation. While urban HoReCa firms face the pressures of high consumer expectations and intense competition, rural firms face challenges related to resource scarcity and infrastructure constraints. Cristina et al. (2021) bring empirical insights to this divergence, revealing how regional development variables influence and shape the economic and sustainable landscape of Romanian regions. Their work is seminal in understanding that the sustainability narrative in the HoReCa sector is not monolithic, but rather a tapestry of diverse, place-specific stories. This nuanced understanding is further developed by Braşoveanu (2023a), whose examination of the environmental impact of regional development makes a significant contribution to the academic discourse, highlighting the multiple environmental imperatives that characterise the sector's commitment to sustainability.

Integral to these stories is the environmental attitude of businesses, a determinant identified by Iraldo et al. (2017) as a catalyst for 'greening' the competitive advantage of hotels and restaurants. Their research into the hospitality sector reveals an encouraging trend of growing environmental awareness among businesses, linking environmental responsibility with economic prosperity. The willingness to adopt green practices is seen not just as a response to regulatory pressure, but as an integral part of a business strategy that resonates with modern consumers.

Consumer dynamics significantly shape the trajectory of environmental practices in the HoReCa sector. In a world where consumer preferences can determine the direction of business development, the findings of Rustagi and Prakash (2022) are particularly relevant. Their review of consumer attitudes towards green food sheds light on the powerful influence of market demand in driving HoReCa companies towards more sustainable practices. Herein lies a complex interplay in which consumer choice becomes a powerful driver of environmental change within the industry.

To navigate this complex dynamic, a solid theoretical grounding in ecology and sustainability is essential. Petrişor (2016) provides a conceptual framework that is crucial to dissecting and understanding the HoReCa sector's approach to environmental concerns. His perspectives anchor the discussion within the broader context of territorial systems, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how ecological principles manifest in business practices across different geographical and socio-economic terrains. Urban areas may be at the forefront of adopting innovative sustainable practices due to higher resource allocation and policy enforcement. However, rural areas, with their closer ties to the natural environment and

potential for sustainable agriculture and ecotourism, hold valuable lessons for holistic environmental management (Aivaz and Vancea, 2009; Aivaz, 2018a).

By synthesising these perspectives, this introduction marks a methodological examination of the distinctive environmental subtleties that characterise the Romanian urban and rural HoReCa sector. The research aims to elucidate the potential role of collective engagement in promoting sustainable development within this sector. It examines the concerted efforts of businesses and consumers in establishing a trajectory towards sustainability that reconciles ecological conservation with economic progress.

2. Literature review

In the context of the Romanian HoReCa sector, the dichotomy between urban and rural environments poses unique challenges and requires tailored sustainable practices. The literature provides a comprehensive analysis of these concerns, offering a nuanced understanding of the sector's financial resilience, socio-economic impacts and environmental attitudes.

In examining the complexities of sustainable development, it is imperative to explain the antithetical dynamics present in urban and rural HoReCa units. Urban HoReCa firms are often at the forefront of adopting green practices, driven by increased regulatory pressure and an increasingly environmentally conscious consumer base. In contrast, the rural HoReCa sector, while intrinsically linked to the natural environment, often faces limited access to resources that can facilitate sustainable transitions.

Environmental attitudes within the sector are diverse and can be seen not only in the corporate ethos of HoReCa companies, but also in the behaviour of consumers and decision-makers. Studies such as Petrişor (2013) and Paraschiv and Stan (2023a) highlight the essential nature of interdisciplinary approaches and collective action in promoting a sector-wide trend towards environmental responsibility. These studies show that environmental attitudes are not static, but subject to the influence of a variety of factors, including education, legislation and market dynamics.

The introduction of environmentally friendly practices in the Romanian HoReCa sector has been met with mixed enthusiasm. The varying rates of adoption of these practices are emblematic of the urban-rural dichotomy, where infrastructural and economic disparities create divergent paths to sustainability. While urban businesses may integrate advanced waste reduction systems and sustainable supply chains, rural businesses may focus on local sourcing and maintaining traditional practices that are inherently sustainable. Mihai et al. (2023) address the intersection of sustainability and waste management, arguing for the integration of composting practices into HoReCa business models. Their research shows that composting is not just an operational strategy, but a systemic pivot towards a circular economy. This is particularly important when considering the different capacities and constraints in urban and rural contexts.

Habib et al. (2023) delve into the psychological motivations that drive environmental behaviour in the HoReCa industry, articulating how intrinsic values of altruism and community orientation manifest themselves in actions such as food donation. This elucidation of psychological determinants provides a fundamental understanding of the drivers of green practices in the Romanian HoReCa sector, bridging the gap between urban innovation and rural tradition. While not exclusively focused on the Romanian context, Keirsbilck and Rousseau (2019) provide a framework of consumer behaviour that highlights the central role of sustainable consumption. Their account of sustainability marketing strategies offers

transferable lessons for the Romanian HoReCa sector, arguing for increased consumer engagement as a channel for promoting sustainability in both urban and rural institutions.

The importance of consumer preference for geographically labelled products is explored by Muça, Pomianek and Peneva (2022), with significant implications for local product sourcing strategies in the Romanian HoReCa sector. This focus on localised procurement practices emphasises the strategic alignment of consumer preferences with environmental protection, transcending the urban-rural divide. Petruzzelli et al. (2023) analyse the transformative potential of short food supply chains for sustainable food systems. Also, the interconnection of agriculture and the HoReCa sector discussed by Feher et al. (2021) points to the significance of sustainable supply chains. Their findings reveal the operational nuances within the HoReCa sector, delineating distinct supply chain practices that accommodate both the dynamism of urban markets and the authenticity of rural places.

In the Romanian HoReCa sector, sustainable development is a complex paradigm, as noted by Aivaz, Stan and Vintilă (2021). Their research underlines that urban areas tend to adopt more progressive environmental initiatives due to greater tourism, infrastructure, and regulatory pressures, unlike their rural counterparts, which are constrained by resource availability, demand, and regulation. Furthermore, Aivaz et al. (2021a) highlight the different perspectives of urban and rural stakeholders in the Romanian coastal tourism sector, pointing to a consensus on the importance of environmental protection, but significant differences in approach and attitude. Aivaz's (2018b) study can also be extrapolated to the Romanian context, highlighting differences in travel patterns between urban and rural areas, which may reflect underlying environmental attitudes within the HoReCa sector. The analytical work of Munteanu Florea and Aivaz (2017) provides empirical insights into tourism services in Romania, highlighting patterns of service provision that significantly influence environmental strategies in HoReCa businesses. This analysis helps to understand how service provision can be tailored to promote sustainability in different geographical contexts. Exploring coastal and maritime tourism, Stan (2022) provides an analysis with broader environmental policy implications applicable to the wider urban and rural HoReCa sector, enabling a more coherent understanding of environmental priorities across different geographical zones. Şumovschi (2022) examines the impact of the pandemic on rural tourism and presents strategic insights that are useful for rural HoReCa entities seeking to align with the emerging 'back to nature' trend as part of their sustainable development agenda. Vintilă, Stan and Ionițiu (2021) analyse investment trends within the Romanian coastal HoReCa industry, shedding light on how investment preferences in urban versus rural environments could steer sustainability efforts and influence practices.

The financial resilience of HoReCa firms, empirically assessed by Aivaz and Căpățână (2021), suggests a post-pandemic recovery trajectory that could affect the sector's sustainability imperatives. Aivaz and Micu (2021) assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist inflows, highlighting its broad impact, which drives the need for sustainable practices regardless of urban or rural location. A detailed examination of profitability dynamics by Aivaz et al. (2021b) reveals the impact on labour costs within the sector, contributing to the discourse on the dichotomy between profitability and sustainability in urban and rural areas. Wijaya et al. (2021) examine factors influencing economic growth, including labour market dynamics and demographic change. Their findings, while broad, are relevant to the labour market and economic development of the HoReCa sector in different geographical contexts.

Policy dialogues, such as those by Bottiglieri, Toldo and Pettenati (2016), present a compendium of best practices that, while emanating from an urban-centric discourse, have the potential to inform sustainable policy frameworks adaptable to the Romanian rural

environment, signalling opportunities for policy convergence. In the same vein, the role of legal frameworks in promoting sustainable development (Braşoveanu, 2023b) underscores the legal underpinnings that influence sustainable practices in the HoReCa sector, bridging urban and rural regulatory environments.

In synthesising these academic contributions, it is clear that sustainable development within the Romanian HoReCa sector is not a monolithic endeavour, but one that requires a delicate balance between environmental imperatives and the heterogeneity of the urban-rural spectrum. Each establishment's geographical location, consumer base and resource availability determine the direction and trajectory of its sustainability journey.

In summary, the literature reflects an acute awareness of the multiple challenges and opportunities presented by the urban-rural dichotomy in Romania's HoReCa sector. It articulates the need for a dynamic, context-sensitive approach to fostering environmental attitudes and practices. It is incumbent upon stakeholders to reconcile economic considerations with the imperatives of ecological conservation in order to create an ethos of sustainable development that transcends geographical and socio-economic boundaries.

3. Methodology and data

The main objective of this empirical research is to elucidate the divergence in environmental concerns and sustainable practices between urban and rural units within the Romanian Hospitality, Restaurant and Café (HoReCa) sector. Specifically, the research aims to analyse and quantitatively measure the sector's attitudes towards environmental sustainability and its propensity to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

A structured questionnaire, based on the Likert scale paradigm, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), was carefully prepared and distributed to a stratified sample of economic agents operating in the Romanian HoReCa sector. The response pool consisted of 87 duly completed instruments.

The statements evaluated included:

- [REC] In Romania, recycling is done well enough.
- [PRO] Future generations will surely find a solution to protect the environment; we do not need to worry about it now.
- [PME] There are more important things in life than protecting the environment.
- [AME] Many of the alleged threats to the environment are exaggerated.
- [SME] It only makes sense to do something for the environment if others are doing the same.
- [VME] I would donate part of my income if I was sure that the money would be used to prevent pollution.
- [RGU] Romania is full of rubbish.
- [EDU] There is a lack of environmental education in Romania.
- [NME] We are not doing enough to protect the environment.

The data collected through the survey was subjected to exploratory analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The SPSS analysis allowed for the identification of statistical patterns, correlations and variations in responses based on the geographical location (urban vs. rural) of the respondents. The use of descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation and comparison of means formed the core of the analytical methodology, enabling the research to provide a nuanced understanding of environmental attitudes and sustainability practices within the Romanian HoReCa sector.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, we detail the findings from our investigative analysis, which delineates the complex interplay between organizational profiles, stakeholder engagement, and environmental sustainability activities. So, the range of statements examined provided a revealing insight into the dominant attitudes and beliefs of the sector's economic actors on a wide range of environmental issues.

A first question on the questionnaire was: *In which HoReCa division do you work?*

Table 1. HoReCa division where respondent works

HoReCa division	EDU	NME	VME	PME	SME	RGU	REC	AME	PRO
hotel	4.50	4.33	3.33	1.83	2.08	3.67	2.08	2.17	2.00
restaurant	3.76	3.90	3.43	2.38	2.71	3.71	1.95	2.43	2.24
catering/delivery	3.00	5.00	4.00	2.00	1.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	1.00
cafes - tea rooms	4.75	5.00	3.25	2.25	2.25	4.75	1.25	1.50	2.50
fast-food	4.50	5.00	3.50	2.25	2.00	4.25	2.00	2.50	2.00
other	4.35	4.47	3.41	3.24	3.24	4.41	2.00	3.12	3.12
Total	4.19	4.32	3.41	2.49	2.63	4.02	1.95	2.51	2.42

(Source: Authors' work)

Table 1 shows the responses of the Romanian HoReCa sector to environmental concerns.

Hotels generally agreed (scores around 4) that there is a lack of environmental education (EDU) and that more needs to be done to protect the environment (NME). Their views on the exaggeration of environmental threats (AME) and the seriousness of recycling (REC) are closer to "slightly agree". The low score for 'There are more important things in life than protecting the environment' (PME) indicates disagreement with this statement, reinforcing the recognition of the importance of environmental issues.

Restaurants show a similar level of agreement with environmental education and the need for action as hotels, but with slightly more scepticism about the exaggeration of environmental threats (AME) and slightly less conviction about the adequacy of recycling efforts (REC).

Catering/Delivery services strongly agree (score 5) with the need for environmental education (EDU) and the need for more action (NME). They are neutral or 'slightly agree' with proactive environmental protection by future generations (PRO), suggesting some doubt about relying on future solutions.

Cafés and tea rooms strongly agree with the importance of environmental education (EDU) and are neutral to slightly agree with most other statements. They strongly disagree (scores close to 1) with the adequacy of recycling efforts (REC), indicating a critical view of current recycling practices.

Fast-food outlets show strong agreement with the need for environmental education (EDU) and action (NME), as do coffee shops, but they also show disagreement with the adequacy of recycling efforts (REC) and the exaggeration of environmental threats (AME).

Other establishments consistently agree with the need for environmental education (EDU) and more environmental action (NME) and are neutral to slightly in agreement with

other statements, with the notable exception of being critical of recycling efforts (REC) and waste in Romania (RGU).

Overall, there is a consensus across all types of institution on the need for improved environmental education and action (EDU and NME), with scores above 4 indicating agreement to strong agreement. Scepticism about the current state of recycling (REC) and waste management (RGU) is evident across the sector, with scores generally tending towards disagreement. There is a range of opinions on whether environmental threats are exaggerated (AME) and whether there are more important issues than the environment (PME), but the scores suggest that while there is some agreement that these are concerns, they are not as prominent as the need for education and action.

The second question on the questionnaire was: *What is your position in the HoReCa division?*

Table 2. Position held by respondent

Position occupied	EDU	NME	VME	PME	SME	RGU	REC	AME	PRO
owner	4.00	4.47	2.84	2.00	2.11	4.16	1.47	2.00	2.00
manager	4.11	4.11	3.67	2.33	2.22	3.22	2.44	2.56	2.56
employee, no management position	4.50	4.33	3.58	2.75	3.00	4.21	2.08	2.75	2.38
other	3.50	4.00	4.17	3.50	3.67	3.83	2.33	3.33	3.67
Total	4.17	4.31	3.41	2.52	2.66	4.00	1.97	2.53	2.41

(Source: Authors' work)

The data set represents a cross-sectional analysis of environmental attitudes across different hierarchical levels within the Romanian HoReCa sector (Table 2). Interpretation of the scores suggests that across all positions there is a notable recognition of the lack of environmental education (EDU) and the inadequacy of current environmental protection measures (NME), as indicated by the higher mean scores above 4. These responses indicate a recognition of the need for increased environmental initiatives and awareness.

Conversely, the lowest mean scores across the board are observed in responses to the effectiveness of recycling (REC) and the proactive resolution of environmental issues by future generations (PRO), indicating a critical view of current recycling processes and scepticism regarding the postponement of environmental responsibility.

Interestingly, *owners* tend to express less agreement with the statements on voluntary monetary contributions to prevent pollution (VME) and the presence of waste in Romania (RGU) compared to *employees who are not in management positions*. This divergence may reflect a difference in personal investment or perceived control over environmental practices, with owners possibly being more aware of the financial implications of such contributions and the operational challenges of waste management.

The *manage* and *other* categories show relatively higher agreement with the perceived exaggeration of environmental threats (AME) and the notion that environmental efforts are only worthwhile if reciprocated by others (SME), suggesting a more cynical or pragmatic view of environmental activism. This may be indicative of the challenges faced by managers in implementing environmental practices within the constraints of business operations.

Overall, the aggregated mean scores are consistent with a general consensus on the importance of addressing environmental concerns within the HoReCa sector, with particular

emphasis on the need for improved environmental education and action. However, there are notable differences in perspectives on the effectiveness of current recycling efforts, the prioritisation of environmental issues and the belief in collective action for environmental sustainability.

The third question on the questionnaire was: *What type of locality do you work in?*

Table 3. Type of locality where the respondent works

Type of locality	EDU	NME	VME	PME	SME	RGU	REC	AME	PRO
rural, outside the metropolitan area	5.00	5.00	3.00	2.50	4.50	5.00	3.00	2.00	1.50
rural, in metropolitan area	3.50	4.50	3.00	3.50	2.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
small urban (under 100,000 inhabitants)	2.33	2.67	2.67	3.00	3.33	3.00	2.00	3.33	4.00
medium urban (100,001-200,000 inhabitants)	4.00	4.60	3.60	2.80	3.20	4.60	1.60	2.20	2.60
large urban (over 200,001 inhabitants)	4.21	4.21	3.55	2.55	2.41	4.14	2.07	2.45	2.21
tourist resort	4.56	4.75	3.44	2.00	2.25	3.81	1.63	2.38	2.38
Total	4.19	4.35	3.44	2.47	2.56	4.02	1.96	2.46	2.42

(Source: Authors' work)

This dataset (Table 3) provides a nuanced view of environmental attitudes in different types of localities within Romania, from rural areas to large urban centres and tourist resorts.

Rural localities outside metropolitan areas have the highest mean scores (5.00) for both lack of environmental education (EDU) and insufficient efforts to protect the environment (NME), indicating a strong consensus on these issues within these communities. This reflects the need for sustainable development strategies that include rural areas, which are often neglected in environmental policy-making.

Analysing the data for *rural localities within metropolitan areas*, it is evident that these areas show a moderate level of agreement with environmental concerns. With a score of 4.50 for recognition of the need for environmental protection (NME), these communities acknowledge the current inadequacies of environmental efforts. However, with a score of 3.50 for environmental education (EDU), they have a balanced view, suggesting an awareness of environmental issues, but perhaps also access to more resources or information due to their proximity to metropolitan centres. This moderate attitude extends to their perception of the effectiveness of recycling (REC), which is also neutral at 3.00, indicating neither strong approval nor strong disapproval of current recycling efforts.

Interestingly, the difference in scores between rural areas within and outside metropolitan areas may be indicative of the influence of urban proximity on environmental perceptions. The higher scores for recycling effectiveness (REC) and confidence in future generations to solve environmental problems (PRO) in rural metropolitan areas suggest a more optimistic outlook, possibly due to closer links to urban resources and initiatives.

Small urban localities reflect a lower awareness of environmental problems (NME) and educational deficits (EDU) compared to larger urban areas. However, these localities express

higher agreement with the need for collective action in environmental efforts (SME), which could be attributed to the closer community structures that facilitate collective initiatives.

Medium and large urban areas show a recognition of environmental challenges, with mean scores above 4.00 for both EDU and NME, consistent with Filip, Stan and Vintilă (2016) findings that urban areas are often more exposed to the impacts of unsustainable practices, thus fostering greater awareness and potentially demand for sustainable development.

Tourist resorts present a particularly interesting case, with high scores on environmental awareness (NME) and education (EDU), coupled with low agreement on the success of recycling (REC) and the lowest score on reliance on future generations for environmental solutions (PRO). This is consistent with Stan, Țenea and Vintilă (2014) argument for the critical need for sustainable tourism strategies that address immediate environmental impacts in these high-impact locations.

Overall, the data support the contention that a strategic and differentiated approach to sustainable development is needed, recognising the different environmental perceptions and attitudes of different types of localities. This differentiation is essential to formulate targeted interventions that take into account the specific challenges and opportunities in rural, urban and tourist contexts in Romania.

In conclusion, the analysis of the responses from different sectors within the Romanian HoReCa industry reveals several pertinent trends regarding attitudes towards environmental issues. There appears to be a universal recognition of the deficit in environmental education (EDU), with companies consistently rating this concern above 4 on a scale indicating agreement to strong agreement. This consensus underlines a collective recognition of the importance of improving environmental literacy as a fundamental measure for promoting better environmental stewardship.

In terms of the actions needed to protect the environment (NME), there is again a sector-wide consensus on the urgency of more substantive action. This unanimity suggests that stakeholders within the industry perceive current efforts as insufficient and recognise the need for more robust and perhaps innovative strategies to protect the environment.

However, scepticism emerges in the context of recycling efficiency (REC) and waste management (RGU), with lower scores indicating a prevailing critical attitude towards current practices. This critical view extends across the sector, indicating a general dissatisfaction with the status quo and a potential call for overhaul or significant improvement in these areas.

The divergence in attitudes becomes more pronounced when considering the perceived exaggeration of environmental threats (AME) and the prioritisation of environmental issues (PME). There is a discernible range of opinion on these aspects, but nevertheless the results tend to recognise that while these are concerns, they do not eclipse the overarching imperative for environmental education and concrete action.

The cross-sectional dataset reflects these attitudes across different hierarchical levels, with a notable distinction between owners and non-managers in terms of voluntary contributions to pollution prevention (VME) and perceptions of waste (RGU) in Romania. This dichotomy may illustrate different perspectives shaped by roles and responsibilities within the industry, with financial and operational factors likely to influence the views of owners.

Management and other categories show relatively higher levels of agreement with the view that environmental threats may be overstated (AME) and express a pragmatic view of the value of individual environmental efforts depending on reciprocal actions (SME). This pragmatic or perhaps cynical view may reflect the pragmatic challenges of reconciling environmental initiatives with business objectives.

An interesting geographical dimension is added when considering the responses from different localities, ranging from rural to urban and tourist centres. Rural communities, particularly those outside metropolitan areas, express a strong consensus on the lack of environmental education and action. This may underline a recognition of the unique environmental challenges and needs of rural areas, which are often underrepresented in policy formulation.

Contrasts between rural localities within and outside metropolitan influence zones suggest that proximity to urban centres may lead to more optimistic attitudes towards recycling and future environmental solutions, probably due to better access to resources and environmental initiatives.

Small urban localities are less aware of environmental issues than their larger counterparts, possibly due to less direct exposure to the negative effects of environmental degradation. Conversely, medium and large urban areas, as well as tourist resorts, show a higher level of awareness and concern about environmental challenges, probably as a result of more direct exposure to the consequences of unsustainable practices.

The data set points to the need for a stratified approach to sustainable development, which recognises and integrates the different environmental perceptions of different locations in Romania. This highlights the importance of designing localised, context-sensitive interventions that respond to the specific environmental and socio-economic dynamics at play in each setting.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the academic discourse reveals a multiple discourse of environmental concerns and sustainable practices within the Romanian HoReCa sector, punctuated by a strong urban-rural dichotomy. There is a general recognition within the sector of an educational deficit on environmental issues, which calls for a concerted effort to improve environmental literacy. There is also a shared sense of urgency for more significant environmental action, indicating a collective awareness and willingness to move beyond current sustainability efforts.

In this context, Cristina et al. (2021) provide an important empirical assessment that highlights the link between economic dynamics and environmental protection, reinforcing the imperative to advance environmental governance. This is complemented by Petrișor (2017), who advocates for a diversity-based approach to the development of socio-ecological systems, emphasising the diverse integration of sustainability across spatial and socio-economic spectrums.

However, scepticism about the effectiveness of recycling and waste management practices remains, with calls for significant improvements echoing throughout the sector. Differences emerge in perceptions of the exaggeration and prioritisation of environmental threats, suggesting variability in how different actors weigh these issues against other operational imperatives.

Hierarchical and geographical factors clearly shape these attitudes, suggesting different experiences and perspectives between management levels and locations. In particular, owners and non-managers show contrasting perspectives on pollution prevention and waste management, likely influenced by their respective operational and financial interests. Managers and other employees tend to be pragmatic, if not somewhat cynical, about environmental threats and individual efforts, reflecting the tension between environmental and business objectives.

Geographical analysis shows that rural areas, especially those away from metropolitan influence, consistently recognise the need for increased environmental education and action.

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