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## **IS TOURISM THE WAY OF RURAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT?**

### *CZY TURYSTYKA JEST DROGĄ ROZWOJU OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH?*

**Key words: rural tourism, agritourism, rural tourism development of rural areas**

*Słowa kluczowe: turystyka na obszarach wiejskich, agroturystyka, rozwój obszarów wiejskich*

**Abstract.** The paper discusses problem of rural tourism and agritourism role in the healing of the economic situation of rural areas, especially in a province with the smallest average farm size and favourable natural conditions – namely in Malopolska. Agritourism (farm tourism) as a part of rural tourism is often seen as an opportunity to expand and diversify employment and incomes. But in spite expectations of rural economists agritourism neither solved the farmers' income problems nor has been developing as expected. Reality of agritourism development was evaluated on the basis of conducted surveys. The perspective of farm tourism development should be seen as a integral part of structural changes of rural economy. In rural tourism development the natural environment has particularly important role and value as the main factor attracting visitors. The level of services offered by agritourism farms has become more and more important. The second important factor signalled by potential tourists is such farms specialisation. Conducted surveys confirmed appreciation of specialisation both by farmers and potential tourists. Farmers indicated financial problems of elevating services standards and specialisation.

### **Introduction**

Global as well as local changes of the last decades concerned also the way we spend our free time. These changes, coupled with new ideas and approaches to leisure time let to interest in spending time in rural areas, that in consequence led to development of rural – agritourism services. The definition of rural tourism as agritourism has been the subject of many debates in literature internationally as in particular countries. It is also connected with different definitions of rural areas. Local authorities and other bodies throughout Europe are considering rural tourism as a key part of local development, usually with a specific focus on the use of the local heritage [Roberts, Hall 2001]. Local natural conditions create favourable conditions for development of different types of tourism, length of tourism season and so on. Tourism is termed rural when the rural culture is a key component of the product to offer. Depending on the primary activity component of this product, the terms used are agritourism, green tourism, gastronomic, equestrian nautical adventure, historical/cultural tourism and so on [Gopal et al. 2008].

Agritourism in the Polish way of defining it – is an activity run by farmers, and if specific conditions are fulfilled their activity is free tax obligations. The conditions are: rooms can be rent only to people on vacations, rooms must be in a dwelling house, which is on the farm in rural areas. The number of rented rooms can not exceed 5<sup>1</sup>. Other tourism services provided by rural dwellers are defined as rural tourism.

Agritourism is predominantly small scaled, nature friendly, ethno-cultured and much less harmful than mass-tourism. Even if rural tourism, agritourism may be minor in relation to the overall tourism market of many countries its importance to the development of specific rural areas may be critical. In the areas where farming production has disintegrated but where a strong rural communities exist, the differentiation between rural tourism and agritourism seems to be justified [Sznajder et al. 2009]. Thus, the multiplier effect is often more impacting in rural areas where the entire rural lifestyle is looked for a main attraction (for instance Podhale in Poland). Agritourism – tourism on the farms enables farmers to diversify their activities while enhancing the value of their products and property, allows to generate additional income keeping alive traditions, local crafts and skills, everything that creates rurality. Although it is often contradicted by the level and modernity of services expected by tourists (Internet, satellite TV and so on).

<sup>1</sup> Act of July 2nd 2004 on Freedom of Economic Activity. Dz.U. 2007, nr 155.item 1095

The most severe changes occurring in Poland after moving from centrally planned economy to free market seemed to concern rural areas. It have been farmers, especially in small farms that the hardest way experienced the new production conditions. The small scale of differentiated production in the situation of the soaring prices of input and dropping prices of raw agricultural products meant lowering or lack of agricultural income on farms. The farmers have been forced to look for additional sources of income. For many reasons rural tourism, including agritourism seemed to be the right choice. Agritourism has been seen by many rural economists [Krzyżanowska 1996, Matlagiewicz 2006] as the most effective way to improve the situation and as one of the most important elements of so called multifunctional rural development [Siekierski, Dudek 1995, Duczkowska-Małysz 1995, Kisiel et al. 2008]. Agritourism has also one very important advantage – money earned that way comes from towns, whereas purchasing all other services and goods produced in rural areas is limited by local dwellers' financial possibilities. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council's estimates, one job in the tourist sector creates three in other fields. This helps to develop rural areas with low agricultural productivity and agricultural overpopulation.

Relatively low costs of adapting to such activities and external market (mostly dwellers of big agglomerations) were pointed out by all those who rural tourism seen as panacea to rural economic problems. Similar opinion was expressed by Bojnec [2004] who wrote: „Using existing farm capacities, farm tourism is inexpensive to develop, and provides alternative accommodation facilities for different tourist demands such as social, heritage, green and eco-tourism”. In general agritourism (farm tourism) is considered to be an alternative to mass tourism with growing number of people interested in that form of spending free time. Natural environmental attractions are of critical value when decision of spending free time is made by families and individuals.

Rural tourism and agritourism development differ across countries, took different directions, even the meaning of terminology is different. But there is one common feature for all countries – the potential customers require better and better quality of services. Agritourism services basically mean (inexpensive) accommodation in a farmhouse. Tourists more and more often want rooms with bathrooms and even apartments – independent units consisting of a room, bathroom and kitchen or kitchen annex. For family houses adapted to agritourism services it is often difficult from architectural point of view but more important is the cost of such alterations.

Malopolska province has the smallest farms with very high number of people living in them. During last 10 years in Poland the average size of individual farm over 1ha changed from 8.0 ha to 9.0 ha, whereas the number of such farms dropped from 1 881 000 to 1 766 000, it means only by 6%. In 2009 in Malopolska province there were 185 344 individual farms over 1ha but only 3.1% of them had over 10 ha. Small farms with difficult production conditions – especially in the south of province – mountains and sub mountain areas – cannot support farm families but have had potential for tourism services.

In 2009 there were 6992 tourism accommodation objects. Malopolska has the highest number of them – 894. Although the statistical data concerning agritourism farms are rather vague, the official data for 1993 indicated 1000 farms with tourism services whereas in 2007 – 8806, it means nearly 9 times more. As with other objects of tourism accommodation Malopolska has the highest number of agritourism farms – 1590 in 2007 [www.minrol.gov.pl] which means 0.86% of all farms in the province. Southern part of Malopolska province thanks to it mountainous and sub mountainous character can be attractive to tourists nearly the whole year long – both investments in tourism attractions and accommodations can be more profitable than in other parts of Poland.

### Material and methodology

After 20 years of indicating agritourism as one of the simplest ways of improving weak economic situation of Polish rural areas and better or worse ways of promoting agritourism as the cheapest way of spending free time there is very limited number of agritourism farms and rather limited economic result for rural areas of such activities. Although the surveys conducted by several authors [Balińska 2009, Berlik 2009] rather confirm importance of agritourism both among the farmers and potential tourists, it is not confirmed by the growing number of tourism farms or tourists spending time in rural areas – although rather unreliable statistical data cannot be the most important in that matter. Summer 2011 can be very symptomatic in that matter – hope also profitable for all providing tourist services in Poland, also in Malopolska province. With political unrest in the North Africa and Asia many Poles and other European nations can decide to spend summer holiday in their own or neighbouring countries, including services offered by rural areas and agritourism farms.

Two types of survey questionnaires were prepared: for tourists and for farmers. Surveyed tourists were random persons met at the locations, farmers running agritourism farms were chosen through their Internet pages. Other farmers were random person, often in the vicinity of “agritourism” farmers. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by the author and with help of Extension workers responsible for agritourism on their area.

The data of surveys conducted in Malopolska province during the summer of 2010 (Dębno, Laskowa communes) as well as Lublin province (Kazimierz Dolny, Nałęczów, Puławy) concerned several issues connected to running a tourism services. 76 farmers indicated among other questions those answering the one placed in the title of that paper: “Is tourism the way of rural areas development?” But surveys were conducted also among potential agritourism farmers – people who were thinking about “may be” starting agritourism activities (24 respondents of Dębno and 34 of Laskowa).

The surveys to identify the opportunities and threats to rural tourism development, its financial impact on farms’ income and their competitiveness and also tourism impact on a regional development have been conducted by the author for several years. Different aspects were underlined – problems of farms organisation, economic results, interaction with agricultural production, competitiveness, sustainability, influence on rural development, the European Union financial assistance and specialisation of agritourism farms. Also the potential tourists were asked what they need and expect of agritourism (dwellers of Krakow, Katowice, Zamość) farms and services. Some parts of the recent surveys were used for this paper.

## Results

All surveyed farmers among those running tourism farms indicated non-agricultural income as the main reason for undertaking agritourism activities. The farmers “thinking” about agritourism also have seen it as important way of additional income but the reasons of not starting with such an activity were mainly two: lack of certainty they can succeed in tourism (43%) and lack of financial resources for adapting the farm, especially the family house, for a new purpose – accommodating tourists (37%). Lack of specific knowledge, age, too small houses were among the other indicated reasons.

If farmers were looking for additional income only 37% of them declared their expectations were met. Although the percentage of income received from tourists in the total family income was connected with the size of farm, market production or its lack, members of family working outside the farms or abroad – “tourism” income was indicated as important. Farmers indicated that they could have more guests if they could provide better conditions. It has been confirmed by surveys among the town population – potential tourists have higher and higher expectations and needs. A room with a bathroom seems to be the most basic. Of course there are tourists with limited resources looking for “cheap holiday” but those who can pay more are going to choose farms with higher standard or other kinds of accommodation. A room with own bathroom as a condition of spending time in an agritourism farm indicated 72% of respondents. The numbers of farms categorised with specific categories, although they cannot represent all tourism farms – clearly indicates that this is the bottleneck of agritourism development. Surveyed town dwellers declare: “rural area and farms are OK but the hygienic conditions must be in high standard”. There are several “conditions” indicated by town dwellers: technical infrastructure, accessibility, fresh air, local natural food and so on but among those depending on farmers and their technical and financial possibilities are direct accommodation conditions, meaning rooms with bathrooms were the most important. Although tourists indicated even such small requirements as “night lamps by the bed for reading the books” – at least some people still needs lamps for such purposes. The surveyed population of city dwellers cannot be representative for the whole Poland but literature, students surveys and direct contacts with people confirm growing needs of potential agritourism clientele. Agritourism development from the potential customers point of view can occur only through providing higher standards of services, mainly accommodation.

The population living in the rural areas of southern part of Malopolska region have been used to tourists for more than a century. So the first place in the number of accommodation units and agricultural farms is consequence of natural conditions and long-time tradition. But if farmers want to utilise those advantages have to “listen to” the potential customers and improve their services.

The surveyed farmers alike in other parts of Poland [Roman 2010, Prochowicz 2010] prove the popularity of agritourism as an additional activity and a factor creating new jobs in rural areas but it does not mean they are ready to undertake such an activity. It seems to be well known possibility and easy enough to start a new business. Lack of more detailed knowledge about legal and tax

conditions of running agritourism farms as well as limited or none knowledge about the possibilities of obtaining the EU funds or other sources for that purpose consist also very important factors limiting those who are willing to start agritourism activities as well as those who could expand and develop their existing agritourism services.

Usually dwellers of rural areas are positive towards inflow of tourists, the higher education level or direct financial profit the higher acceptance of seasonal guests in rural areas. Elderly farmers with no future perspectives of participating in tourism benefits were mostly against seasonal disturbances caused by tourists. Other respondents could see positive influence of tourism – more jobs, more money, more care about villages aesthetic and infrastructure, development of commerce and compatible services.

Respondents evaluation of local authorities help was rather low, only 17% approved their activities in supporting tourism and promotion both of tourism and a region. Advisory – Extension Centres (ODR) gained more positive opinion – 43% declared them as a source of knowledge about agritourism activities, training organisers or direct advisors helping with farm or building adaptation.

The result of question about farm cooperation in providing services for tourists was much higher than in the previous years when farmers usually answered “no” or the “cooperation” was limited to information about addresses of the other farms in neighbourhood. It seems that farmers can see their common profit by jointly organising attractions for tourists (grills, bonfires, field trips, sledge trips and so on).

As factors limiting their investments in agritourism (development of services, specialisation), even if they had adequate number of visitors giving them optimistic evaluation of their non-agricultural activities, they pointed out: lack of financial resources, fear of the future – making debts, “too difficult way to EU funds”, hope for finding out of farm jobs, including working abroad. Only 21% of respondents declared that they more or less systematically invest part of “agritourism” income in developing that part of farms activities, for instance: new beds, rebuilding of dining room, grill space with wooden table and benches, adaptation of an attic for tourist use and so on. Some of them also became appreciate specialization (14%) of services and their investments are directed towards chosen specialisation (apiculture, horses with winter manege, health farms, disable persons as guests and so on).

## Conclusions

Nearly 20 years of new economic conditions – free market economy – has been rather difficult for farmers, especially in small, fragmented farms in mountains and sub mountains region of Malopolska. Although the region has long and rather good tourism traditions with many necessary advantages such as interesting natural characteristics, reach folk culture, the highest number of different kinds of tourist accommodation, well known hospitality, distinctive local traditional food, tourism has not gained the expected level of development, nor the economic significance. In the case of agritourism the last years and surveys conducted by many persons and institutions indicate rather much slower development of agritourism farms, even slower grow of the level of provided services. The most difficult element of the farmers’ houses adaptation to tourism purposes is lack of bathrooms. Family house has usually one bathroom, sometimes two, or a bathroom and a toilette, which was enough for a family but cannot be accepted by more and more tourists who want to have separate bathrooms or so called apartments. Building additional bathrooms in existing building can be difficult and expensive for farmers who decided or want to start agritourism activities as a last resort on farms with none or very limited agricultural income.

Although the number of agritourism farms has been growing their number in comparison to the amount of all Polish farms over 1ha in 2007 was only 0.5% (about 1,800,000 farms over 1ha and 8806 agritourism farms). For many families their agritourism activities have been successful and helped them survive on the farms or even improve their living standards, for other tourism helped them meet the ends, some had to resign, other watching the successful neighbours try to start agritourism activities.

But looking at the scale of agritourism activities in Poland or even in Malopolska it would be very difficult to recognise agritourism as a way of solving financial problems of too many Polish farms in which agricultural production is limited to family needs or is too small to provide adequate income to maintain a family. Agritourism has been a good solution for rather very limited number of farms. Their future success in that field can be limited by their possibilities in investing in further improvement of provided services and their scale of individual entrepreneurship.

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### Streszczenie

*Omówiono problematykę znaczenia agroturystyki w rozwoju obszarów wiejskich i skali jej oddziaływania na rozwiązanie sytuacji ekonomicznej gospodarstw rolnych, zwłaszcza małych, które produkują głównie na potrzeby własne lub których produkcja rynkowa jest minimalna i zmuszone są szukać dodatkowych źródeł dochodów. Wielu ekonomistów upatrywało rozwiązania problemów poprzez podjęcie działalności agroturystycznej przez znaczną liczbę gospodarstw rolnych. Wolna siła robocza, wolne pomieszczenia mieszkalne, stosunkowo tanie i łatwe dostosowanie gospodarstw do pełnienia roli kwater turystycznych oraz rynek zbytu w miastach wydawały się dawać przewagę nad innymi formami działalności pozarolniczej. Po dwudziestu latach działania rolnictwa w nowych warunkach ekonomicznych prowadzone badania wskazują, że agroturystyka w istniejącej skali, formie i na obecnym poziomie może być raczej ratunkiem dla nielicznej grupy gospodarstw. Mimo, że dla tych gospodarstw może mieć duże znaczenie w wielkości dochodów rodziny, w żadnym wypadku nie ma szans na szersze łagodzenie problemu niskiej dochodowości znacznej części gospodarstw rolnych w Polsce. Wielofunkcyjny rozwój wsi w nieznacznym stopniu może się opierać na agroturystyce.*

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