

*Ewa Pałka*

## **THE IDENTIFICATION AND ESTIMATION OF LOCAL CONDITIONS OF AGROTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS**

### **Summary**

An analysis, identification and assessment of the local conditions of agrotourism development in rural areas is performed in the paper. The important role of tourism both in the state policy and regional policy have been shown in the state and regional documents. In most of European countries off-farming activities become more and more important as a source of income for farmers' families. In some regions agrotourism can be regarded as a significant non-agricultural activity. In Poland the data of Agricultural Census indicates that the number of farms with off-farms activity increased. The agrotourist farms are still more and more important in many parts of Poland, especially in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship. The local and voivodship authorities are obliged to improve and invest in agrotourist base, also using the European Union funds.

This study is the analysis of natural and social-economic elements of geographical environment in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship. The article is a trial of showing how rural areas are diversified for agrotourism.

**Key words:** agrotourism, development of rural areas, tourist function

### **INTRODUCTION**

Important feature of transformational processes in Polish agriculture is development of sector of new forms of economic activities. At present times non-agriculture activity of farms is of great importance, especially for the idea of multifunctional development of rural areas.

The development of this kind of economic activity leads to a decrease in the number of people employed in agriculture. In the same way the employment in other economic alternatives sectors in rural areas increases. In connections

with these changes of employment agriculture and rural areas are very close connected with other economic sectors.

The increasing of employment in alternative sectors gives farmers possibility of receiving new incomes. Thanks to it their economic situation and conditions of life are still better and better. Also rural areas become more and more attractive as the places of living and working.

One of more important non-agriculture forms of activity in Poland is agrotourism. In Drzewiecki 's opinion [1995] agrotourist is a form of services giving to tourists staying in farms.

Development of this type of activity gives new chances of employment and animates the local rural economy [Pałka 2000]. Tourists staying in rural areas increase demand for goods and also non-tourist goods and services. It is especially important in situation of reducing income from plant and animal production in agriculture. Also, because of increasing unemployment in rural areas, agrotourist activity may be more and more important.

Moreover, agrotourism does not degrade the natural environment to the same degree as mass tourist. In Poland it is also important that development of agrotourism does not require large financial resources from farmers.

The development of agrotourist activity of farms depends on external factors (like: development of technical and social infrastructure, preparing of local and regional authorities and interior factors (farmers' financial resources).

At present, numerous barriers often restrain influence of all these factors and the development of agrotourism.

The success of farmers starting agrotourist business depends on possibilities of overcome many different difficulties [Antoszek, Sobczyk 2004].

The Świętokrzyskie voivodship in the scale of the country can be treated as model. The different conditions in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship are recognized as favourable to agrotourism development. Landscape and rest values and also cultural richnesses of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship make superb perspectives of tourist development in rural areas. Also the structure of agriculture, mainly in central and north parts, is appropriate for creating new alternative sources of incomes by farmers. Not all rural areas in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship have the same conditions and predispositions to agrotourism development. Because of this it was necessary to analyze the main natural and social-economic conditions of agrotourist development in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship.

The main aim of the study is the analysis and determination of natural and social-economic conditions which have influence on agrotourism development. This phenomenon is illustrated by the example of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship.

The area of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship is located in the central part of Poland and its area is 11,691 km<sup>2</sup> (it is 3.7% of country area). Its area cover

legally protected areas possessing unique environmental value. The Świętokrzyskie voivodship is the area in which rural areas are of great importance. The voivodship is situated next to the largest urban-industrial agglomerations like Warszawa, Łódź, Kraków. The level of urbanization in the voivodship, measured by the percentage of urban population, is not large and amounts to 46.0% (it is one of the lowest levels of urbanization in Poland). It can be said that the most important problems in agriculture and rural areas are also problems of most population in the voivodship. The time range of this study depends on source materials. These materials collected in the course of field research come from the results of Agriculture General Cenzus. The data were collected from the Agriculture General Census Reports which covered all the communes in the area under consideration.

#### **THE EVALUATION OF TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS IN RURAL AREAS**

Tourist attractiveness is often discussed in literature. Some authors say that it is a complex notion and is determined by both tourist amenities, the quality of the transportation system and the supply of tourist services. Tourist attractiveness is a factor which is able to attract tourist to different places. The notion of tourist attractiveness has relative meaning [Kruczek, Sacha 1994].

In other authors' opinions tourist attractiveness of the region announces the possibilities of attract of tourists into different places and depends of many amenities which form demand for tourist services [Baranowska-Janota 1973].

Tourist attractiveness is a relative notion and influences the size and kind of developed tourist forms. Attractiveness indicates possibilities of development of various forms of tourism. If one place may be used for many different forms of tourism it has universal character [Kruczek, Sacha 1994].

Many authors say that tourist attractiveness is complex notion and should be analyzed in global way. There are many different factors which form it. They are as follows: the sort of natural environment amenities, transport services and supply of tourist services [Lijewski, Mikułowski, Wyrzykowski 1985; Warszńska, Jackowski 1978].

The main elements of tourist attractiveness are tourist values. This term qualifies the group of natural environment elements, which may interest tourists and be the main motives to visit different places or regions [Rogalewski 1979].

The tourist values may include attractive landscape, therapeutic values of climate, good conditions to skiing, ancient monuments and also calm, silence and high level of tourist services.

According to functional factor tourist values are divided into groups:

1. Resting values which are the base of tourist development and they depend on natural environment amenities.

2. Sightseeing values which are the objects of tourists' interests and the base of tourist services development [Kruczek, Sacha 1994].

3. Specialist values which are correlated with elements of natural environment elements and make possible to develop different form of tourism.

In this article, the evaluation of all elements of tourist attractiveness was conducted for the sake of tourism development. The attractiveness indicators were calculated for all communes of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship. With the adopted investigation procedure it was possible to show how the attractiveness differed across the voivodship area, and also to group the communes into five categories according to the tourist attractiveness indicator, that is, to differentiate the potential of communes' for tourism development.

Thanks to this procedure it was possible to differentiate the state of tourist attractiveness of all rural communes and delimit microregions with different degree of tourist predisposition [Pałka 2008]. In this way five groups of communes with different values of tourist attractiveness indicators (WA) were created.

The first group (WA greater than 0.5) comprises the most attractive areas of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains region and communes that lie in the south part of the voivodship: Sędziszów, Pińczów, Wiślica, Staszów.

The communes located in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains region are characterized by very good recreational amenities and high forest coverage. The communes located in this region have very good possibilities of developing qualified tourism because of large concentration of sightseeing values.

The second group (WA = 0.4-0.5) is composed of high attractiveness communes. It is located in the north-west, west and central part of the voivodship. These are areas which have good recreational amenities, specialist values, but less varied landscape. They comprise communes located near Kielce town like: Strawczyn, Miedziana Góra, Masłów, Zagnańsk, Morawica and in north and east part of the voivodship.

The third group (WA = 0.25-0.4) are areas with medium tourist attractiveness. It comprises the largest part of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship. They are the communes that do not have much valuable recreational amenities, woodland and less varied of relief.

The next group of communes have WA of 0.15-0.25 and it comprises areas with low tourist attractiveness located mainly in south and east part of the voivodship.

The fifth group (WA < 0.15) comprises unattractive areas. These areas have no varied landforms and lack in sightseeing amenities. They are characterized by weak development of tourist infrastructure. Because of this tourist services do not have good possibilities to develop.

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**AN APPROACH TO ASSESS SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS  
OF AGROTOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

Agrotourism is a specific form of non-agricultural activity of farms. As a rule, all forms of economic enterprising are undertaken and located in well economically developed regions, which are characterized by high values of economic indicators. The agrotourist activity can be undertaken in different areas. At present times agrotourist farms are generally located in communes which are characterized by inconvenient phenomena, like for example: high per cent of unemployment, adverse demographical processes or underdeveloped settlement system [Hasiński, Głaz, Kemonia 2004].

The characteristic feature of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship is the different role of agriculture in its particular parts. The agricultural function dominates in rural areas of south part of the voivodship. Only some small towns: Busko Zdrój, Jędrzejów, Pińczów, Włoszczowa are situated there. The agriculture in this part of voivodship is characteristic of its intensification and specialization. Besides, there are located soils best for agricultural production (class I, II and III). The agricultural function in the north part of the voivodship does not play an insignificant part, as in south part [Pałka 2004]. In the north part some larger towns are located, which are the places of jobs for most their inhabitants. This region is more industrial than south, an agricultural part of the voivodship. The agriculture makes only extra source of income in rural areas for the population working also in industry and services [Pałka 2004].

Moreover, the greater part of the north possesses natural conditions of the environment, which make agriculture difficult to function.

The main depopulated areas in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship are typical, agricultural regions, where inhabitants were afflicted with serious economic problems or where natural conditions to agriculture are not profitable.

Especially young people migrate to large urban and industrial agglomerations, because they do not have possibilities to improve their difficult economic situation in the place of their living [Pałka 2002].

Considering the percentage of participation of unemployed population living in rural areas, the Świętokrzyskie voivodship has the third place in Poland (the first is the Podkarpackie voivodship - 63.1% and the Małopolskie voivodship in the second place - 54.4%).

In the end of December 2002, 71 310 unemployed people living in rural areas were registered in the voivodship (54,3%).

The unemployment in rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship is characterized by little territorial differentiation. The largest per cent participation of unemployed in rural areas is in the *powiats* of Kielce (93.3%), Włoszczowa (77.6%), Opatów (76,1%), Busko (72.6%), Kazimierza (71.0%), and Końskie (70.6%). The lowest per cent participation of unemployed in rural areas is in the *powiats* of Ostrowiec (28%), Skarżysko (30.7%), Starachowice (42,1%).

The unemployment in rural areas relates especially to young people. In the end of December 2002 in population of unemployed, mainly people in the age of 18-24 years predominated (number of this people is 22 424, that is, 31.4%).

To summarize it can be said that in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship the high per cent participation of unemployed living in rural areas is 54.3% (in Poland 41.7%).

In population of unemployed living in rural areas, people in the age of 18-34 years (61.7%) and staying without jobs over one year (56.7%) predominate.

The unemployment in rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship is at present a serious social problem. The aspiration of the government to suppression of small and unprofitable farms and unpredictable future in rural areas in Poland after accession to European Union causes that young people prefer to migrate to towns and urban-industrial agglomerations or abroad than stay in the country and be connected with agriculture [Śledzianowski 2002].

#### **ASSESSMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN VIEW OF AGROTOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

Apart from tourist amenities, the character of the existing spatial structure of agriculture significantly affects the development of agrotourism. Agriculture has been well-established as a major sector of the economy in most rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship. That resulted from the economic processes which have taken place so far, and also soil and climatic conditions. It should be emphasized that the agricultural function is complementary to the function performed by the protected areas.

The whole of the voivodship can be divided into three parts due to the quality of agriculture production space. Favourable conditions for agriculture production are found in the south and south-east of the province, the least favourable conditions occur in the north and west. The central part of the voivodship is characterised by average conditions.

The types of the land use in a given area also affect the development of agrotourism. The agriculture land use is meant to involve the activities that are directly related to agriculture production. Land used for agriculture production is traditionally referred to as arable land. The term covers the following categories based on the character of land cultivation: farmland, permanent grasslands also called meadows and pastures, and orchards.

The decision how to use the land depends on many factors. They include natural conditions, especially soil and water conditions, and the soil capability to support a certain kind of agricultural production. At various stages of economic and social development the decisions on land use can be influenced by the market needs, labour resources and production technologies.

The distribution and assessment of the land use in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship is presented below. The character of land use can be of importance for tourism development because typical agricultural landscape becomes more attractive when is diversified through a decrease in farmland and increase in meadows, pastures, forests and woodlands. The above seems reasonable for landscape of versatile land use forms, where its components remain in balance.

The structure of arable land, i.e., the proportions of farmland, orchards and grasslands is of great importance for the economy and organization of farms. In Poland, traditional farming practices aimed at maximizing crop production. Consecutive generations of peasants worked on almost exclusively family-run farms without measuring labour input. As a result, farmland, which dominates over a larger part of the province, makes 75.5% of all the arable land. The percentage is strongly diversified as the variation ranges 30 – 88%.

The highest (above 75%) share of farmland in the total arable land is found in the communes located in the south-east of the voivodship (Wodzisław 87.1%, among others). The communes of Samorzec and Obrazów have the lowest (below 45%) share of farmland in the total arable land, which results from the dominant role of fruit farming in the area. The communes of Stąporków and Bliżyn, on the other hand, also with low farmland share, have the highest percentages of meadows and pastures, and also of forests.

Meadows and pastures to total arable land ratio, like that of other forms of land use, demonstrates spatial differentiation. High share of meadows and pastures is an advantage for livestock breeding farms. Meadows and pastures to total arable land ratio is a decisive factor while selecting strategies for agriculture production. In all developed countries the share of meadows and pastures has been growing because raising animals for meat and dairy products has been a dominant sector of agriculture production for many years. Such a trend is typical of Western Europe which has highly commercial agriculture. Although the share of meadows and pastures has always been high there, it still continues to increase.

In the Świętokrzyskie voivodship, meadows and pastures take up 20.4% of the arable land total. The value ranges from 3.5 to 47.4% in different communes. The voivodship's north-western part has the largest area of meadows and pastures, the maximum percentage value is found in the commune of Staszów. The most fertile meadows and pastures occur in the poorest habitats, river valleys, boggy or even swampy areas. The soil quality classes of such terrain are low and the areas are either unploughable or very difficult to farm. The communes in the north-east and south-west of the voivodship have a low share of meadows and pastures, which results from the land being allotted to farming and orchards.

Fruit growing has been practised in the voivodship for centuries. Plant cultivation and fruit picking require great labour input, which is the reason why the business is run mainly by privately owned farms. Other contributing factors are narrow horticulture specialization and economic policies.

Fruit growing spatial distribution is affected by various conditions, both physiographic, and also social and economic. Agro-climatic conditions are of primary importance because fruit trees and plants are characterized by long cropping cycle, and are strongly sensitive to heat conditions and water conditions in the soil. The most favourable agro-climatic conditions for a majority of most fruit trees and plants include as long as possible growing season, warm summers, mild winters and abundant precipitation relatively uniformly distributed throughout the year.

The factors above account for extremely diversified orchard share in the voivodship. The average value amounts to merely 4.1% of the arable land total. The maximum values are found in the communes of Obrazów, Samborzec, Sandomierz and amount to 59.5%, 55.3% and 31.8%, respectively. In other communes, constituting a larger part of the voivodship, orchards to arable lands ratio takes on the value lower than 1%. The reason for such spatial distribution lies in agro-climatic conditions, especially soil and thermal conditions.

For tourism, an important feature of the land use is the share of forests in the total area. Forests and woodlands make up 27.3% of the voivodship total area. The share of forests is usually inversely proportional to that of arable land. The communes with strong agriculture have lower forest share, and high forest-share ones are not leaders in agriculture. This regularity is clearly seen in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship. Forest coverage in the south-west and north-east of the voivodship is low, i.e. below 6%. Representative communes are those of: Skalbierz (0.1%), Samborzec (0.3%), Złota (0.4%), Mirzec (0.7%), Obrazów (0.8%), Wojciechowice (1.0%), Sandomierz (1.0%). The highest forest coverage, exceeding 18%, occurs in the west of the voivodship in the communes of Stąporków, Krasocin, and Kluczewsko. The communes that lie in the zone from the north-west to the south-west are characterized by forest coverage ranging 6 - 12%. In the land use forms, forests are extremely important as they greatly contribute to the development of different types of tourism.

“In accordance with the criteria and assumptions in agriculture geography, the specification of agriculture types is based on investigating inherent features of agriculture that are interconnected and mutually dependent” [Stola, Szczęsny 1982]. Following the statement above, a type of agriculture is a synthesis-based notion covering all the significant features of agriculture. The agriculture type represents agriculture characterized by similar diagnostic features. Specific feature patterns re-occur in time and space, so the same agriculture types can be found at different places and time. Investigations into agriculture types in Poland’s rural areas were conducted by Stola and Szczęsny. Koziej [1990] and Śmigielska [1992], among others, conducted similar investigations in the former voivodship of Kielce. The authors specified the agriculture types prevailing in the voivodship.



The agriculture types are spatially differentiated in the voivodship. Market-oriented, productive, commercial and mixed agriculture type is generally the most common in the voivodship and it prevails in its southern and north-eastern part. That agriculture type is characterized by high commercialisation and production for sale, both in plant and animal production, high degree of specialization and high profitability. The exact location of this agriculture type in the province is related to favourable agro-climatic conditions, and also a substantial share of farms of relatively large area. The agriculture type under consideration contributes to the development of intensive agriculture, like, e.g., fruit growing, yet it does not facilitate non-agriculture economic activities, including agri-tourism, which results from a high degree of production specialization. Traditional, semi-commercial agriculture of medium productivity, locally market-oriented and commercial, is found in the south-east and south-west of the province. That agriculture type provides a transition between the southern part and the central and northern ones. In the centre, north and north-west of the province, traditional, small-scale, semi-commercial agriculture, with prevailing animal production, is present. The farms, usually of relatively small acreage, which represent that agriculture types tend to be low-income, family-run businesses. They provide small-scale production largely to cater to their needs. Their locations are most often characterized by less favourable natural conditions (lower *index* of the quality of *agricultural production space*). Due to its characteristics and low degree of specialization, the type of agriculture mentioned above is an advantage when it comes to non-farming business development. Consequently, the area shows a high percentage of double-skilled population. The type of agriculture discussed above facilitates agrotourism development as it makes it possible for visitors to spend their leisure time at small, highly diversified, family farms. Embedded in local traditions, the farms become even more attractive, especially for visitors who are city dwellers.

The Świętokrzyskie voivodship has large workforce resources. That entails selecting such animal and plant species for breeding and cultivating for which high labour input is necessary. It is not only natural conditions that should be considered, other factors which also have to be taken into account include the local government's policies, agricultural traditions and the economic background. Koziej [1990] advocates multi functionality as a stimulus for the economic advancement of such regions. It must be also remembered that the Świętokrzyski National Park, its protection zone, a number of landscape parks and other protected areas are all located in the voivodship, so economic function should be subordinated to the nature conservation, which means newly established enterprises cannot cause any losses to the natural environment.

Pałka [2004] indicated that “environmentally sound agriculture based on the principles of sustainable development would be a good solution for those areas”, and so would be “modifying rural settlement network to include produc-

tion functions related to processing food and providing non-agriculture production and services". The communes located in the north-east and the south parts of the voivodship are characterized by conditions that are favourable to "intensive development of fruit growing industry connected with intensive processes of agriculture restructuring". Depending on local conditions, farms can seek additional sources of income from complementary activities. The activation of the tourist function will create new jobs, thus diminishing the surplus of workforce. Additionally, it will boost the demand for natural, healthy produce, both fresh and processed.

### CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the analysis presented above:

– Adverse social and economic conditions (high unemployment, negative demographic processes, high percentage of the population employed in agriculture) do not hinder the development of tourism, on the contrary, they could provide a development stimulus.

– The areas of lower *index* of the quality of *agricultural production space* more often have a chance to perform the tourist function than those of higher indexes.

– The more diversified is the structure of land use, the more attractive is the site for tourists who choose to stay at farms.

– Fragmented and multigenerational extended family farms facilitate agrotourism.

– The communes with most attractive tourist amenities and the most advantageous features of the land use are the most likely to succeed.

– Local government should more actively support the initiatives of local communities.

– More attention should be paid to the marketing of agrotourist farms, both on the local and domestic markets.

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Ewa Pałka  
The Institute of Geography  
Jan Kochanowski University, Kielce

Reviewer: *Prof. Stanisław Węglarczyk, Ph. D, Dr. Sc*