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AGRITOURISM AS A FORM OF INCOME DIVERSIFICATION ON FARMS IN KOŚCIERSKI DISTRICT

DZIAŁALNOŚĆ AGROTURYSTYCZNA JAKO FORMA DYWERSYFIKACJI DOCHODÓW W GOSPODARSTWACH ROLNYCH W POWIECIE KOŚCIERSKIM

Key words: rural tourism, agritourism, Pomorskie, Kościerski County

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka wiejska, agroturystyka, województwo pomorskie, powiat kościerski

JEL codes: Q12, Q13, Q17

Abstract. The main aim of this study was to explore the potential of agritourism development in the Kościerski region. The study also aimed to establish the sampled farmers' interest in and satisfaction with agritourism as a form of income diversification. A survey was carried out among all farm owners engaging in agritourism activity in the Kościerski region (44 persons). The research tool was a questionnaire which identified the level of interest and satisfaction of respondents with an agritourism business. The research shows that getting involved in agritourism gives the opportunity to diversify farm income in the Kościerski Region. The natural and agricultural conditions are conducive, and the farmers are trying to provide an adequate standard of accommodation and quality services.

Introduction

In the past quarter of a century, agritourism has been a source of additional income in rural areas [Sikora 1999, p. 13.]. In many cases, offering this form of tourist service requires investment, which is accompanied by risk. However, the situation in agriculture in Poland's Kościerski County – that is, low-revenue, small-scale farms – has prompted farm owners to engage in additional activities. Kościerski County boasts conditions that are highly conducive to running an agritourism business. Located in the Kashubian Lake District, it offers a wealth of picturesque hills, lakes and thousands of acres of forest. All of these features attract tourists and boost agritourism.

Aim, scope and research methodology

The aim of the article was to research the growth potential of agritourism in Kościerski County and the level of interest farmers have in and satisfaction they derive from agritourism as a form of income diversification. Questionnaire research was carried out among the owners of agritourism farms. The following questions were asked: when do you host guests, which courses and workshops should hosts have to boost their professional credentials, how do you promote your agritourism services, what do you offer tourists, are your agritourism facilities modified to accommodate disabled individuals.

The research was carried out to include all 44 of the agritourism farms that were operating in the county in 2013. A survey was used to collect the empirical data for the research. The study was conducted at the beginning of January 2013 during a meeting of members of the Kościerska Cottage Association (Stowarzyszenia Kościerska Chata). The questionnaires were distributed and collected in person, and this was the lone contact between the researchers and respondents. Most of the questions concerned the farm's preparedness to offer agritourism, its profitability and the satisfaction the respondents gained from opening up their farms to agritourism.

Characteristics of the research population

The respondents' ages broke down as follows: 15 were 46-55, 11 were 36-45, nine were 26-35 and another nine were 56 or older. There were 29 women and 15 men. The vast majority of respondents (18) had a secondary education and 12 a higher education. Eight reported finishing trade school and the remaining six finished school with a primary education.

The concept of rural tourism and agritourism

Rural tourism is a form of tourism organised in rural and forest areas [Knecht 2009, p. 75, za: Tomczak et al. 2004, p. 199]. It's a form of relaxation that gives tourists an opportunity to come into close contact with the local community, and also to take advantage of the benefits villages and their surroundings offer [Roman 2015, p. 136]. Rural tourism is associated with all types of recreational activity that involves wildlife, hiking, health, sightseeing, cultural and ethnic tourism [Kozuchowska 2000, by: Drzewiecki 1995]. This type of tourism is not necessarily based on accommodation, though when accommodation becomes available it is not necessarily in the homes of farmers [Wojciechowska 2009, p. 19, by: Drzewiecki 1995].

Rural tourism may also be understood as a widespread form of alternative tourism, with participants given the opportunity to experience the peace and quiet it provides. It may involve passive or active relaxation in the natural environment. As Maria Dębniwska i Maria Tkaczuk note, „rural tourism may be considered tourism that takes place in rural areas, is adapted to the conditions that prevail there and rationally uses the location's natural resources” [Dębniwska, Tkaczuk 1997, p. 10].

Agritourism is one form of rural tourism [Gaworecki 1982, p. 11]. It is offered on individual farms, which provide housing, partial or full meals, horseback riding, the opportunity to participate in the farm's labour and many other leisure activities in the country [*Nowa encyklopedia...* 2003, p. 22].

According to Jolanta Wojciechowska, agritourism is also “a form of rural tourism that operates on farms. Farming families offer this as a product based on the farm's resources and tourist attractions available in the area” [Wojciechowska 2009, p. 34].

The newspaper *Gazeta Rolnicza* defines rural tourism as a form of tourism directly related to the village and farming. The owners of tourist farms provide services including accommodation on the farm, exploration of the farmland and participation in local events, ceremonies and festivals.

In the last quarter of a century, agritourism has garnered significant attention in national and world publications on rural economics. The word agritourism is a combination of two parts: agro and tourism. The former is derived from the Greek word *agros*, meaning land. Tourism is a form of active leisure outside the home, which is inspired by cognitive needs as well as the desire for recreation and to do sport. The concept of “agritourism” was introduced by the owners of farms offering tourist services [Przezbórska, Sznajder 2006, p. 9].

Farm owners have expressed substantial interest in agritourism because it represents an additional source of income. It is conducted only on farms, using free rooms and buildings, while the products and services produced by the farm are likewise incorporated into the offer [Dębniwska, Tkaczuk 1997, p. 11].

In Poland, interest in agritourism is the result of objective processes, reflecting the economic and social interests of three groups [Dębniwska, Tkaczuk 1997, p. 11-12]:

- city dwellers – satisfies their need for peaceful and affordable relaxation;
- farmers – offers a source of income outside of farming to top up household budgets;
- rural communities (municipalities, villages) – provides additional income for local budgets.

Research results

The research done for this paper focused particularly on household amenities and facilities available at the farms and the preparedness of farm owners to offer agritourism. In the first part of the study, the farmers were asked about their desire to participate in courses to improve their

professional skills. Courses and training to prepare farmers for agri-tourism activity is a very important element supporting the development of this type of business. Those who complete courses or training will have had the opportunity to increase their knowledge of agritourism and consult with advisors. Unfortunately, only 20 of the 44 respondents participated in such courses or took advantage of financing.

When asked which institutions organised courses preparing farmers to offer agritourism services, 33 respondents indicated the Pomorski Agricultural Advisory Centre in Gdansk, while the other 11 named the Labour Office in Kościerzyna. The owners of tourist farms advertised predominantly online, as 35 of the individuals indicated. However, a full 38 of the respondents stated that word of mouth and the opinions of tourists vacationing at the farms were the best form of advertising. 24 of the respondents ran advertisements in association-issued tourist catalogs. In Kościerski County the *Kościerska Cottages Association* publishes such a catalogue. Nine respondents also placed offers in databases. Another two use business cards. So owners advertising their farmhouses used both traditional forms of advertising including word of mouth (which they evaluated very positively) and a number of modern forms, including Internet resources and publications to promote the region.

29 farms hosted guests throughout the year, while the other 15 hosted seasonally and 9 provided services at Christmastime. Facilities for tourists in the farms were arranged in different ways. Frequently rooms were located in a separate residential building (15), while others were located in a separate part of the farmers' homes. Figure 1 presents detailed information on this question.

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* Respondents could give more than one answer/Respondenci mogli wskazać więcej niż 1 odpowiedź

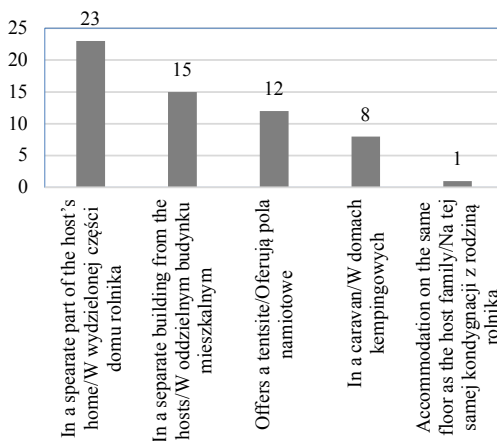


Figure 1. Accommodation types at the farms surveyed

Rysunek 1. Rozmieszczenie miejsc noclegowych w badanych gospodarstwach agroturystycznych

Source: own calculations
Źródło: wyniki badań własnych

Tourists visiting during the high season were quite often able to use campsites or caravans offered by the farmers. Only in one home were the guest beds located on the same floor as those of the host family. The vast majority of respondents offered their guests rooms located in a separate building or in a separate part of their homes, which created comfortable conditions for the tourists to stay in.

For guests visiting the farms in larger groups, the hosts offered three-person rooms (35 farms) and four-person rooms (20). The fewest respondents indicated that they had either one-person and five-person rooms. The farm owners made an effort to suit the room type to the guests' requirements. Most of the farm owners (33) included breakfast in their offers. figure 3 presents the meals offered at the farms.

Breakfast at most farms was included in the price of the stay. 25 of the respondents also offered lunch, while slightly fewer served a combined lunch-supper and supper. 11 did not serve

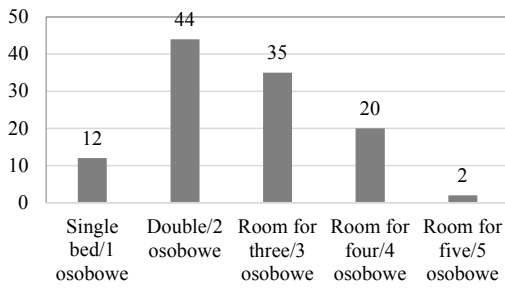
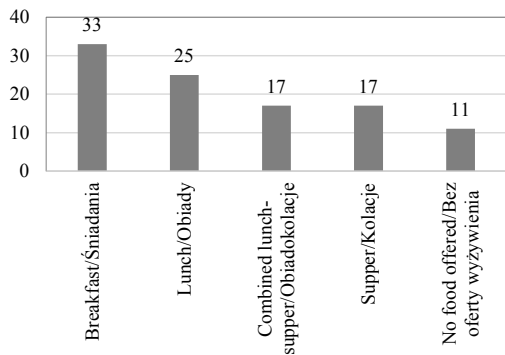


Figure 2. Number and type of rooms offered at the farms

Rysunek 2. Liczba i rodzaj oferowanych pokoi w badanych gospodarstwach agroturystycznych

Source: own calculations

Źródło: wyniki badań własnych



* Respondents could give more than one answer/*Respondenci mogli wskazać więcej niż 1 odpowiedź*

Figure 3. The meals offered at the farms

Rysunek 3. Oferta żywienia w badanych gospodarstwach

Source: own calculations

Źródło: wyniki badań własnych

food. Most offered some variety of meals, most frequently lunch, supper and lunch-supper, and the majority also had products produced on the farm on offer (fig. 4).

The largest number of farms offered eggs (30 individuals), followed by milk, vegetables and fruits, dairy products, products made from vegetables and fruits, honey and other products. The majority of farmers strove to adapt their farms to the demands of the tourists visiting them. Bathrooms with a toilet were mostly standard. Figure 5 presents detailed data. 14 farms were equipped with shared bathrooms. Always in demand on rainy days, salons were available for guest use at 20 of the farms, while 29 boasted a television room. Farms that didn't serve food did provide a separate kitchen (31 respondents). Tourists who travel by car always need a place to park, and 33 of the farms had secure parking. Families with children appreciate farms equipped with a play areas where they can leave their children to play, while they go for a walk. One in three farms had such a playground for children. To feel as though one is in a true village, an orchard or garden are a welcome sight. Tourists vacationing with older children or organised groups/camps appreciate having a pitch or field where they can organise team sports. 35 of the farms offered just such a place. Some also offered a barbecue or fire pit. Given the large number of lakes in the Kashubian Lake District, only a few farms had a pond.

The farms also offered a range of sports equipment, including bikes (a total of 141 in the area), kayaks (60), pontoon boats (22), sailing boats (18), boats (35), fishing rods (80), table tennis (30) and other attractions.

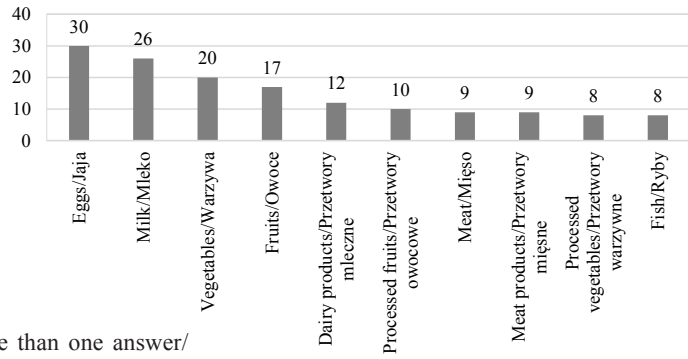
The farms enabled their guests to have an active holiday, which became all the more enjoyable with the opportunity to use the sports and recreation equipment on offer. Each of the farms themselves offered or were located in close proximity to a number of interesting attractions that attracted tourists, who could be active, relax around a campfire or go fishing at a pond. Figure 7 presents detailed information about the activities available to visitors.

To attract tourists to their farms, the farmers offered a range of activities, including fishing for both serious and amateur anglers. Horseback riding for more advanced enthusiasts was available, as were lessons with an instructor for beginners seeking to improve their technique.

Figure 4. The possibility of purchasing home-made goods and products from the farm

Rysunek 4. Możliwość zakupu wyrobów oraz produktów wytwarzanych w badanych gospodarstwach

Source: own calculations
Źródło: wyniki badań własnych

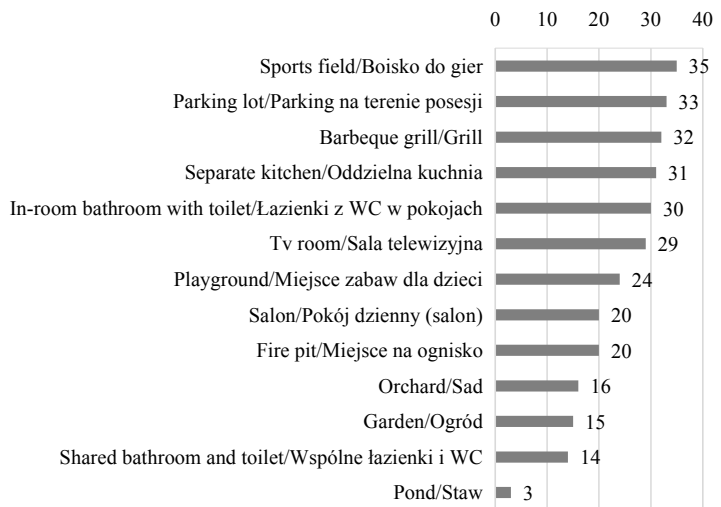


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Figure 5. Amenities improving the standard and attractiveness of the farms to tourists

Rysunek 5. Wyposażenie badanych gospodarstw wpływające na podwyższenie ich standardu oraz atrakcyjności

Source: own calculations
Źródło: wyniki badań własnych



For less active tourists, the farms offer bonfires and live music. For those who want to take in the smell of the forest, group mushroom picking could be arranged, while in winter tourists could go for sleigh rides. Visitors both in summer and winter were offered guided tours of the area. Eight farms offered handicraft demonstrations and workshops. For those who “want to experience a real Kashubian village”, the opportunity to pitch in with the work on the farm was available. Tourists visiting the Kościerskie farms could also admire and look after the livestock.

The issue of adapting the farms to better accommodate individuals with disabilities is very important [Roman 2016], because according to respondents, more and more people with disabilities are visiting their farms.

Farmers from Kościerska have adapted their farms to accommodate individuals with disabilities as follows: 22 farms have driveways, while 14 buildings were equipped with railings, and 12 homes had a bathroom with a toilet for individuals with disabilities. Nine farms in the county offered paved pathways to improve mobility. On the farms which were more or less prepared to receive such persons, 18 did not have thresholds in their guest buildings. Half of the surveyed households were entirely unadapted for individuals with disabilities.

In today’s world, in which disability issues are increasingly being taken into account in the construction of buildings, the households surveyed failed to meet the expected criteria. This is the opinion not only of those owners who do not fulfill the conditions required to serve the disabled, but also for those who possessed limited resources. In this respect, the farmers still have a great deal to do.

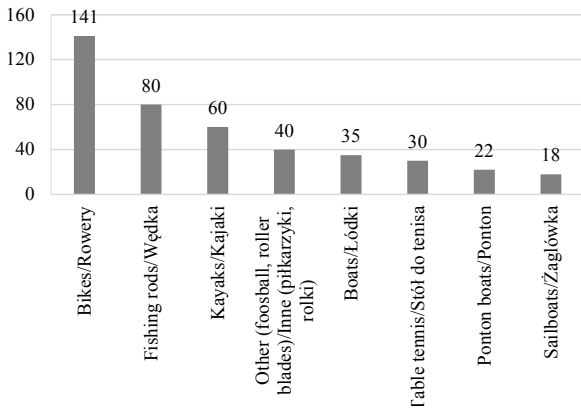


Figure 6. Available sports equipment on or accessible to the farms
Rysunek 6. Liczba dostępnego sprzętu sportowo-rekreacyjnego w badanych gospodarstwach

Source: own calculations

Źródło: wyniki badań własnych

* Respondents could give more than one answer/*Respondenci mogli wskazać więcej niż 1 odpowiedź*

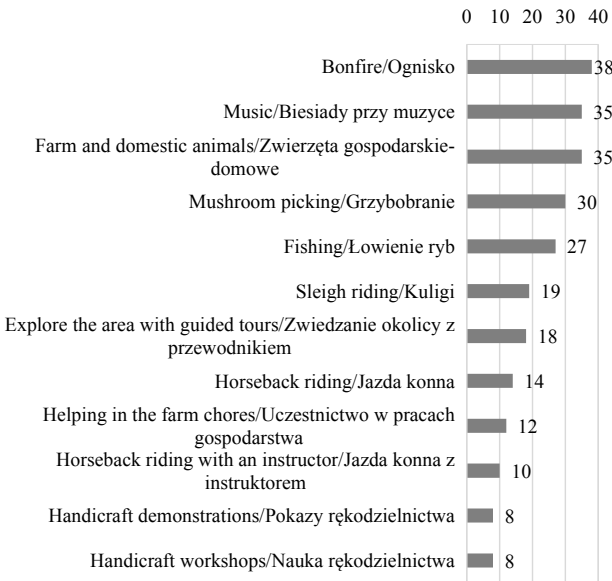


Figure 7. Additional attractions offered by the agritourist farms
Rysunek 7. Dodatkowe atrakcje oferowane w badanych gospodarstwach agroturystycznych

Source: own calculations

Źródło: wyniki badań własnych

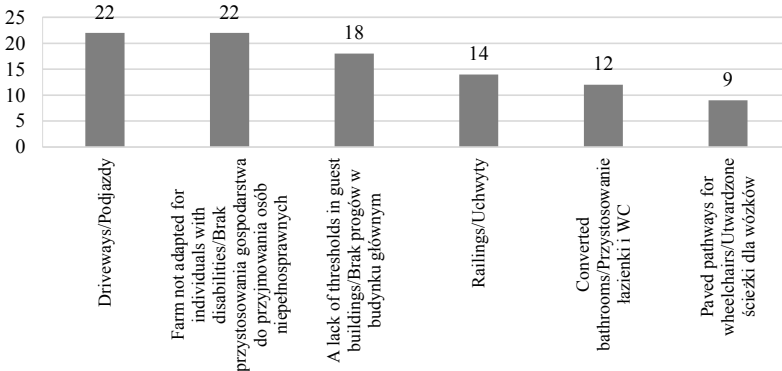


Figure 8. Adaptation of the farms to host individuals with physical disabilities

Rysunek 8. Przystosowanie badanych gospodarstw do przyjmowania osób niepełnosprawnych

Source: own calculations

Źródło: wyniki badań własnych

Conclusions

Farming should serve to satisfy the the needs of farm owners and their families [Prus 2010, p. 17]. Agritourism presents an opportunity to create new places of work and additional sources of income for the inhabitants of villages, while also lifting the overall living standards in rural areas. Unfortunately, farmers limit the risk that accompanies large investment and the requisite modifications to their farms that agritourist activity calls for.

Agritourism represents a real chance to diversify income in Kościerski County. A significant share of the respondents prepared and collected information on conducting agritourist activity by participating in courses organised by the Agricultural Advisory Centre and the Labour Department.

The results of the research indicate that agricultural farms in Kościerski County have numerous opportunities to develop agritourism, above all thanks to its proximity to the Tri-cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot, a source of clients. It is surrounded by picturesque landscapes with forests, lakes and rivers, all much prized by tourists. Farm owners are making great strides in setting their farms up to run agritourism businesses, make the rooms amenable to hosting guests, and create areas where guests can spend their free time. They also offer cuisine that incorporates foods they have been homegrown. Most farms offer guests breakfast and lunch. They also offer the produce of their farms for purchase.

In summary, Kościerski County farmers who offer agritourism do so on well-adapted and well-equipped farms. The majority take tourists throughout the year. It is also important to adapt their facilities to visit for people with disabilities, and prepare offers that will appeal to tourists.

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Streszczenie

Celem opracowania jest określenie potencjału rozwoju działalności agroturystycznej w powiecie kościerskim oraz poziomu zainteresowania i zadowolenia rolników z tej formy dywersyfikacji dochodów. W badaniach udział wzięli wszyscy właściciele gospodarstw agroturystycznych z terenu powiatu kościerskiego (44 osoby). Narzędziem badawczym był kwestionariusz ankiety, który zawierał pytania pozwalające na określenie poziomu zainteresowania i zadowolenia respondentów z prowadzenia działalności agroturystycznej. Badania wykazały, że działalność agroturystyczna jest realną szansą na dywersyfikację dochodów w gospodarstwach rolnych powiatu kościerskiego. Sprzyjają temu warunki przyrodniczo-rolnicze, a badani rolnicy starają się zapewnić odpowiedni standard gospodarstw agroturystycznych oraz jakość oferowanych usług.

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