

THE AGRITOURISM IN ASPECTS OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The increased interest for leisure from recent decades has triggered a powerful development of tourism. Practiced in many of forms tourism capitalizes a number of resources, influence quality of life and economic growth. Agritourism, a form of rural tourism is an alternative and an opportunity for the development of farms. The dynamic development of rural tourism depends from the changes that have taken place in the structure of agricultural holdings in recent years. The aim of the article is to identify the factors, which determine the development of rural tourism in terms of the multifunctional development, which is associated with the protection of natural wealth and socio-cultural heritage of rural residents. Sustainable development (multi-function) is a development which include factors such as: agriculture, ecology, local economy, population, animals and plants.*

Key words: *agritourism, development, region, factors*

INTRODUCTION

The agro-tourism is a recent concept in EU and refers to the forms of tourism directly related to the agricultural activities and/or the buildings with other purposes than agricultural. [6,18] The tourism is a complex activity which includes two other activities: a touristic one and an agricultural one which serves the first one, completes it and complements it. [15, 18]

Agritourism started developing in Poland in the last decade of the 20th century. This development took different forms depending on regions' own characteristics and potential. New trends were observed in agricultural production, which influenced the development of agritourism in Poland. Numerous middle- and large-sized farms gradually changed their production profiles, narrowing product range, and becoming more specialized. Smaller farms found this competition increasingly difficult. While bigger businesses had more land, and started introducing specialized production, smaller farms had to find alternative sources of income, which would guarantee better use of their capital. Thus, a new phenomenon known as "agritourism" started gaining in popularity and, steadily, became the natural choice for the less prosperous farmers. They began by increasing their fruit and vegetable production. This would provide food for the growing numbers of visitors, as well as produce larger volumes of animal feed, and reduce upkeep costs. Breeding birds or furred animals was another step aimed at enriching the tourist offer. At the same time, institutions such as the Agricultural Advisory Centres (AAC) actively engaged in promotion of agritourism in rural areas. [26] According to Wiatrak, agritourism is characterized by its expanse, close proximity to nature, and the freedom of movement. Agritourism offers numerous advantages for an average tourist. To begin with, one can separate from an anonymous crowd of people and start having real social relationships (villagers or other tourists). What is more, one can develop and tighten the bonds with nature by playing various sports in the open air. While agritourism is still developing in Poland, it has been observed that guests often like to maintain contact with their hosts, and return to the farms they once visited. The number of people who have realized the benefits of agritourism and actively engage in this type of business is growing fast. [24]

Despite its growing popularity, agritourism in Poland still remains an innovation. The

researchers were particularly interested in the multifunctional aspect of the development, and focused on its main goal, which is the protection of natural beauty of the land, and the socio-cultural heritage of village dwellers. [2] Similar interests can be found in the sustainable development theory, which keeps agriculture, ecology, local economy, population, and biosphere in high regard. [11] Therefore, the driving force of agritourism is not only the beauty of the land, but the proper and well-thought regional development policy as well. [10] Agritourism may be regarded as a way of improving living conditions and the quality of life of people not only in Poland, but in the world's developing countries too. [23]

The aim of this article is to look at agritourism as an essential tool for the effective development of the Polish countryside. A type of development, which is regulated by law, and can recognize the natural beauty of regions, and their socio-cultural heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Studying some sources from the specialized literature, sources which were mentioned in the biography section, the authors try to presents the factors, which determine the development of rural tourism in terms of the multifunctional development, which is associated with the protection of natural wealth and socio-cultural heritage of rural residents.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The word "agritourism" may include several ideas, which can be defined as individual – related to particular regions, or more general – related to society as a whole, for example creating and improving technical and social infrastructure of the countryside. Indeed, agritourism can improve the lives of village dwellers. Typical examples include developing water and sewage systems, and improving public transport. Such schemes facilitate the opening of new businesses, services and schools.

What is more, visitors can exert positive influence on local people, who might want to broaden their perspectives, discover alternative ways of spending time, or learn new habits. [1,25] The agro-tourism is very much appreciated by the tourists because it involves a series of very well correlated activities and they benefit of a large range of services and also by the activities' initiators who have more complex possibilities to capitalize their available resources. [7,8]

Agritourism becomes more important for city dwellers, too. It becomes an interesting alterative to the commercial tourist industry. [22] It presents city dwellers with an opportunity to temporarily escape from their polluted and noisy surroundings, and gives them a chance to purchase high-quality bio food. [5] Considering the above, it is not surprising that increasing number of holiday makers and regular tourists are changing their preferences, and perceive agritourism as an enticing alternative to popular products offered by travel agents. [16]

Insignificant in agricultural production, the rapid development of domestic handicraft has been gaining in importance as a by-product of agritourism. Handicraft, which is using materials available locally to manufacture different domestic products, has become very popular and attracts numerous visitors. It creates a growing demand for local products, and helps to preserve local traditions. Nonetheless, there are several negative aspects of agritourism, which should be taken into account. To start with, the increased numbers of visitors may have negative consequences for many areas, which - deprived of their natural beauty – might eventually stop attracting visitors. The increased noise, especially around campsites, is certainly a problem. It disturbs the natural peace of the habitat, and often makes it difficult for other tourists to relax. The risk of fire remains a serious problem. While starting a camp fire is allowed in certain designated areas, many tourists, especially

in the peak season, notoriously and callously ignore this regulation. Not only do they break the law, but create a serious threat to the flora and fauna of the area. [17] What is more, agritourism often results in an increased demand for communal services, such as waste disposal, growing prices of land and services; overcrowding, overpopulation and the disappearance of local culture and values. [10]

Legal and ecological requirements for farmers deciding to run agritourist business.

There are certain requirements which have to be fulfilled by entrepreneurs who decide to run an agritourist business. The general requirements regulating running a business in Poland are specified by the Business Running Bill, published on 2nd July 2004 (the Official Journal of Laws, 2004, no. 155, item 1095 as amended). According to article no. 3, the above regulations do not apply to plant and vegetable production, animal breeding, gardening, forestry, or inland fishing. Neither do they apply to farmers who rent rooms, serve meals to their guests or provide other services, collectively known as agritourism. [10] It means that agritourism will not be treated as a taxable business [29] as long as the service is provided on the farm, by farmers personally, and the revenue is not the main source of income. [9]

The bill on Tourist Services (first publ. 29th August 1997, the Journal of Laws, 2004, no. 223, item 2268) defines how tourist services be provided by the agents in the Republic of Poland, and abroad – provided the agreement was signed by the client in Poland. Accommodation may be provided in hotels or other objects, provided the latter meet the minimum criteria regarding necessary facilities, toilets, fire safety standards, etc. Rooms or campsites provided by farmers are understood as "the other accommodation facilities" mentioned in the bill. [31] The Polish law also specifies a number of other conditions which have to be fulfilled so that agritourist businesses could receive guests. One of them is maintaining a high standard of sanitary conditions, subject to inspection by the State Sanitary Inspection. It is the official body whose duty is "to serve public health by supervising and executing health and safety rules in workplaces, securing hygienic conditions for leisure, and supervising hygienic food production, serving and sales." This and other laws regulating the work of the State Sanitary Inspection are listed in the Bill on the State Sanitary Inspection (14th March 1985, the Journal of Laws, 2006, no. 312, item 851 as amended). [30] Observing and executing the requirements set by the State Sanitary Inspection is performed by a local Sanitary Inspector.

An agritourist farm which provides full or half board for its guests is obliged to observe the (WE) No. 852/2004 regulation of the European Parliament and the European Council of 29 April 2004 regarding food hygiene. It states that:

- hygiene is the priority at each stage of production, processing and distribution of foodstuffs;
- the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles must be observed;
- each farm providing agritourist activities must register with SANEPID (the National Institute of Hygiene and Sanitary and Epidemiological Station) 30 days prior to starting the business (the deadline for existing agritourist businesses passed on 28th April 2007) [27]

According to the current law, farmers (including those offering tourist services) are exempt from paying the income tax as long as they do not sell processed foodstuffs. Unprocessed foods include: cereal, fruit, vegetables, herbs, mushrooms, milk, eggs, honey, fish – raw, pickled or dried. The growing demand for small quantities of traditionally-processed foods, the European system of regional products labelling, and the popularity of bio-foods resulted in numerous law changes, and various incentives leading to increased commercial exchange of such foodstuffs. [27]

As far as accommodation is concerned, the Polish law does not specify which conditions buildings have to meet in order to be used as guesthouses. However, a local fire station must confirm that fire safety regulations are observed.

Following the regulation of 19 August 2004 on Hotel Business, published by the Ministry of Economy and Labour (the Journal of Laws, 2006, no. 22, item 169), licensing offices can issue permits for buildings to be used. [28] Since there are no specific laws regarding buildings meant to be used for agritourist purposes, general rules and regulations apply. They were outlined by the Minister of Infrastructure, in the regulation of 12 April 2002, on the location and conditions that buildings have to fulfil (the Journal of Laws, 2006, no. 22, item 169). [21]

Undoubtedly, the location of agritourist farms has enormous influence on their development. All the EU member states are obliged to respect the designated Nature Protection Areas. Since nature is a common resource shared by all people living on the planet, its preservation is in everybody's interest. [13]

The following directives constitute a foundation for the "Nature 2000" European nature protection areas:

- the Habitats directive of 21 May 1992 (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, the EU Journal of Laws, item 206 of 22 May 1992)
- the Birds directive of 2 April 1979 (Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds, the EU Journal of Laws, item 103 of 25 April 1979). [4]

"Natura 2000" is the European Nature Protection network, created by the European Commission. It is "a transcontinental system of the most valuable natural areas linked by ecological corridors." [4] Its main objective is supporting biodiversity by offering a haven and recreating Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, and protecting areas considered particularly attractive.

Under the Birds Directive, the EU member states are obliged to guarantee a safe existence of wild European birds with particular regard to the endangered species. The area commonly known as "the Green Lungs of Poland" was defined in 1983 by Krzysztof Wolfram as "the large area of particular ecological value of social and economical development" [20]

"The Green Lungs of Poland" cover the area of 63 235 sq km, which is, approximately, 20 percent the total area of the country. It is inhabited by, approximately, 4 million people, which amounts to 9.7 percent of the total population of Poland. The area is located in the North-eastern part of the country, including Warmia-Masuria Province, and Podlaskie Province as well as parts of Mazowieckie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Pomorskie regions. "The Green Lungs of Poland" is a part of the "Natura 2000" network. [19] The exceptional ecological and cultural characteristics of the region make it unique not only in Poland but in the whole of Europe. Many people realize its priceless value and heritage, and understand how important it is to protect this exceptional area.

Unfortunately, this undertaking has also numerous opponents, notably permanent residents of the area, who feel that the restrictive environment protection directives considerably hinder its economical development. Truly, due to the legal limitations aiming to protect this precious region, "The Green Lungs of Poland" is not popular an area with potential investors. [3] Indeed, managing such areas requires considerable effort and is may be very challenging.

CONCLUSIONS

More and more farmers consider agritourism as a potential business opportunity. However, in order to be successful, the business has to be properly managed, offer high

quality services, and have a decent marketing policy. At the same time, successful entrepreneurs should constantly monitor the market, observe changes taking place, and be quick at noticing new products emerging. Certainly, adjusting the offer to satisfy the growing demands of clients is a challenge. The demand on agritourist market is shaped by the prices of services and the earnings of their consumers. Agritourism is becoming particularly interesting for less prosperous farmers. It offers a range of leisure opportunities addressed to families, pensioners, organized groups, etc.

It promotes nature, and preserves historic and cultural heritage. While agritourist farms make better use of their workforce, they generate little revenue due to the seasonal nature of tourism. The natural beauty of Polish regions, the increasing experience of farmers, and the effective promotion, attracting rich clients – all these factors encourage the development of agritourism in Poland.

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