

AGRITOURISM AS A FORM OF SLOW TOURISM

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Abstract

The philosophy of slow tourism signs in agritourism. It is a form of tourism which is characterized by the connection of tourist services with an agricultural farm and the possibility of participating in the life of an agricultural family and farm. Agritourism has permanently settled in many European countries and in Poland has been developing with great success since the 90s. Agritourism as a form of slow tourism provides authentic and deep connections with the inhabitants, places, culture, food, heritage and the natural environment. It is a style of travelling which through the elimination of haste gives authentic contact with the environment and achieving inner peace.

The article has the character of a theoretical review. The method used in the work is literature and content analysis. The author is going to review the available publications and own research concerning slow tourism and its role in running an agritourism business. The aim of the article is to show the possibility of slow tourism development on tourism farms in Poland.

Keywords: *agritourism, slow tourism, rural area, sustainable development*

JEL classification: *J43, Q010, Z32, L83*

1 Introduction

Due to the strategy of a multifunctional development of the countryside and agriculture as well as the European Union funds directly allocated to agriculture, rural areas are currently undergoing a number of significant socio-economic changes. One of them is the development of economic activity unrelated to farming (Sikora, 2014). An example of such activity is agritourism, developing in the rural

environment. It is a form of recreation which is present in almost all developed countries around the world. It takes on various forms, depending on the experience, natural conditions, the level of tourism development, etc.

1.1 Agritourism

Generally speaking, the main elements of agritourism include an active farm, involvement in farming activity, and the authenticity of tourists' experience of farming (Phillip & al., 2010). For many authors, the active farm is a key component (Jalinik, 2016; Drzewiecki, 2001, Majewski, 2000; Sikora, 1999), and providing tourism services is a complementary source of income for a farming family (Privitera, 2010).

In Europe, most agritourism facilities/sites can be found in Austria, Germany, Great Britain, France and Ireland (Marcinkiewicz, 2013). In Austria, about 10% of farms offer tourism services that can be used by over 300,000 people. In Italy, there are nearly 7,000 farms with the average of 10 places for guests each. A similar situation is observed in France and Germany (Firlej, 2006). Sikora writes that in West European countries, the average of 3-7% of farms provide agritourism services (Sikora, 2013). Przezbórska-Skrobiej (2015) reports that income from agritourism makes up ca. 15% of the whole EU tourism market. Agritourism activity provides at least one third of the total income of an average farm in the European Union (Firlej, 2006).

This non-agricultural activity increases the incomes of farms and serves farmers other purposes, such as improvement of their life quality (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). The benefits drawn from agritourism are numerous, not only for the farmer, but also for the local community. Agritourism strengthens the local economy, creates employment opportunities and new forms of employment and promotes educational and certification programs which teach young people about farming and natural environment (Privitera, 2010). Agritourism helps in preserving the rural lifestyle and landscape, as well as offers the possibility of practicing "sustainable" or "green" tourism (Ugls & Jęczmyk, 2015).

In the present age of globalization we may observe tendencies towards homogenizing tourists' preferences. Regardless of where they live, tourists expect standardized tourist products and prefer uniform procedures and standards of tourist services (Kachniewska & al., 2012). On the other hand, we can also observe preference polarization among tourists, who represent varied, individual preferences and consumption models. They want to experience something new, unique and prepared specially to satisfy their individual needs and preferences. Tired with the fast pace of living, constant haste and stress, they are looking for peace and quiet. During their journey and rest, they take more responsibility for

what they do and seek authentic experiences. Capable of reflection, they want to stop running for a while (Niezgoda & Markiewicz, 2014).

An idea developing in accordance with these tendencies is slow tourism which ideally fits the formula of resting on tourism farms. We can currently observe a growing interest in this conception among the societies of developed countries (Kacprzak & Gralak, 2015).

1.2 The idea of slow tourism

One of today's trends in the field of tourism is slow tourism (Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011), which derives from the slow food trend (Wiśniewska, 2012). The Slow Food Organization (www.slowfood.com) was established in 1986 in Rome as a manifesto against the "fastfoodization" of life (Burmecha-Olszowy, 2014). The movement was initiated by Carlo Petrini (a charismatic food critic) as a spontaneous reaction against the first fast food restaurant in Italy in 1985 (Sukiennik, 2014). Nowadays, it is an international non-profit organization associating 100,000 members in 160 countries around the world (www.slowfood.com; 18.01.2018). According to Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) slow tourism makes up 10% of the European tourism market and continues to grow.

The concept of slow which follows the idea of slow food (Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011) is becoming popular and concerns various areas of life such as eating and health (slow food), rest and recreation (slow tourism) or work and accommodation (slow life) (Kryk, 2011).

Slow tourism not only tries to fight against the growing pace of the contemporary life, but it goes further, combining qualitative experiences of the slow traveller with the pleasures derived from the journey and stay at travel destinations with the benefits for the local stakeholders (Conway & Timms, 2012). Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) define slow tourism as a form of tourism where tourists avoid travelling by plane and car, take advantage of alternative forms of transportation, and choose longer stay instead of short trips, including contacts with the local community its culture and attractions. According to the definition they propose the main aim of this form of tourism is to shift the focus from the amount of travel towards its quality.

During their journey, slow tourists have contact with the local community, places, heritage, food and natural environment. In this form of tourism they devote their time to travelling, become involved in the visited places and meet the local inhabitants (Meng & Choi, 2016).

Slow tourists have been described by Yurtseven and Kaya (2011) as those who:

- are open to slow experiences, discover new and different cultures and identities,

- are educated, have good knowledge of culture and profess slow philosophy,
- are independent travellers,
- have high expectations from the region they are visiting,
- use eco-gastronomy.

A slow tourist stays at the visited destination longer and tries to get to know the area in much more detail, buys local products, putting their money into the local economy for a longer period of time (Hall, 2006).

The pillar of slow tourism is the philosophy of sustainable development, which encompasses environmental and socio-cultural sustainability (Matos, 2004). In practice, this issue combines elements of sustainable tourism (the economic, ecological and social aspects) and responsible tourism (Burmecha-Olszowy, 2014). This form of travel is to provide tourists with rich experience and minimize the negative influence of tourism on the environment (Kacprzak & Gralak, 2015).

Slow tourism favours rural areas (Matos 2004) where the pace of life is slower and people can practice various slow activities as well as derive pleasure from staying in the countryside (Guiver & McGrath, 2016; Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). Rural environment can be an area where slow tourism will develop. It is predestined to restore the balance between people and nature, as a result of which a post-industrial society rediscovers natural environment (Zago, 2011).

2 Data and Methods

The aim of the article is to make the issue of agritourism as a form of slow tourism less ambiguous. The author describes and analyses the activity in question and shows how it can be integrated into the idea of slow tourism. The article is a theoretical review. In order to achieve the research aim, the author chose the method of literature analysis and used selected scientific books and papers published in scientific journals, regarding identical or related issues. She also used secondary sources of information and applied the descriptive method in the analysis of the research problem.

3 Results and Discussion

In Poland, the fashion for agritourism holidays appeared later than in Western Europe. Agritourism is one of the most important spheres of tourism activity in rural areas which developed in Poland in the early 1990s, using farms as the accommodation infrastructure (Firlej, 2002). Rural tourism in Poland has a long

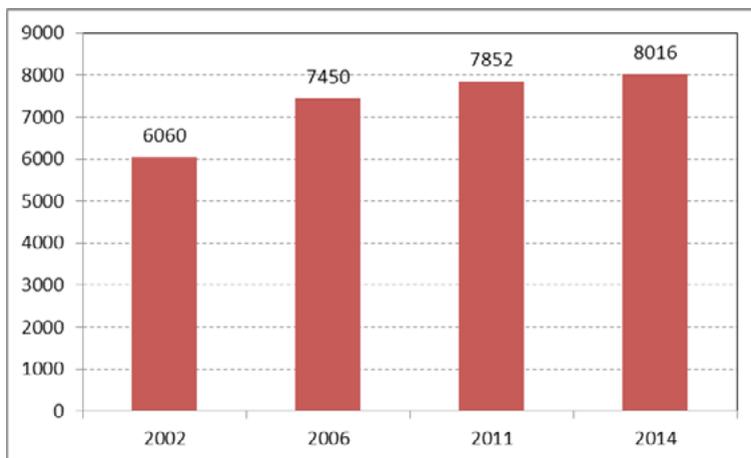
tradition; the country with its infrastructure or farms have been used in different ways for years (Marcinkiewicz, 2013).

Agritourism is a form of rural tourism involving a tourist's stay on a farm (Jęczmyk, 2016). It offers different ways of spending one's leisure time, tourist services are provided on a farm (Sikora, 1999) and plant growing and animal breeding are major attractions (Majewski, 1994). According to Dębniewska and Tkaczuk, a tourism farm is a farm which not only deals with agricultural production (growing and breeding), but also provides tourism services, using natural resources and material goods to satisfy the tourists' needs (Dębniewska & Tkaczuk, 1997).

In Poland, there are over 1.4 million farms, and the average size of a Polish farm is about 10 hectares (Główny Urząd Statystyczny [GUS], 2016). Small farms must look for additional sources of income because they have ceased to be self-sufficient (Sikora, 2014). The development of agritourism on small farms is also recommendable for other reasons. For instance, farmers use very little artificial fertilizers and chemical pesticides, often for financial reasons, therefore they are able to offer ecological food products, even though they do not have formal ecological certifications (Sikora, 2013).

In 2014, the agritourism activity in Poland was run on over 8,000 farms (Figure 1.) offering 84,500 beds (Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi [MRiRW], 2015). Tourism farms include small ones, covering just a few hectares, where the tourism function predominates (mostly in southern Poland), as well as large ones, with a high product output where agritourism is a side activity (mostly northern Poland) (Balińska, 2005).

Figure 1 Number of tourism farms in Poland 2002-2014



Source: Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi. (2015). *Rolnictwo i obszary wiejskie w latach 2007-2015*. Warszawa, 28.

Most of the accommodation offered on Polish tourism farms (70-80%) are guest rooms, much more rarely separate flats and houses or camping sites. On average, a single tourism farm consists of five rooms with 10 beds (five double rooms) (Popkowska, 2015) and the average length of stay is approximately one week (Stefańczyk & Wąsik, 2016; Nowak & Korab 2012).

The number of five rooms on a tourism farm is regulated by the law, as based on the Income Tax Act, tax-free income is that gained from guest room rental to holiday-makers staying in houses located in rural areas, as well as income from providing catering for these people, if the number of rented rooms is not larger than five (Income Tax Act).

Agritourism activity contributes to the multifunctional development of the countryside because it offers the possibility of additional work to local inhabitants at their place of residence, improves the efficiency of using housing resources, makes it possible to use the crops by selling food produced on the farm or nearby, increases the general level of culture, improves the quality and aesthetics of the vicinity and its infrastructure, has an influence on nature protection, as well as integrates the inhabitants to cooperate in order to make their village and its surroundings more attractive (Trębowicz, 2011). Apart from accommodation and catering, more and more tourism farms offer additional attractions in their package, paying particular attention to the quality of the services they provide

(Jęczmyk & Maćkowiak, 2016). Culinary tourism is very popular; tourists discover the local cuisine through tastes, flavours and a whole range of sensations. Ecological food as well as regional and traditional products are promoted. Educational farms present a comprehensive educational offer (Jęczmyk & Bogusz, 2017), while care farms offer care services for children, the elderly and people with health problems (Instytutu Ekonomiki Rolnictwa i Gospodarki Żywnościowej [IERiGŻ], 2016).

The most important characteristic features of agritourism which make it different from mass tourism include its uniqueness and competitiveness (Kozuchowska, 2000). Tourists look for particular qualities of this form of tourism related to the following:

- a farm: the rhythm of farm life, farm work, presence of domestic animals, fresh, local food, smells, sounds, etc.;
- people (family): direct contact with the farmer's family, the possibility to learn about the family's customs, hospitality, new acquaintances and friends, everyday activities of country people;
- rural life: culture, customs, folklore, tradition and the history of the village and the region;
- space: contact with nature, freedom of movement, small traffic, quiet, peace, the possibility of recreation and sport (Wojcieszak, 2017; Sieczko, 2016; Uglis & Guth, 2015; Sikorska-Wolak & Zawadka, 2012; Kozuchowska, 2000). These are significant values attracting tourists to farms which provide tourism services.

From the beginning, agritourism has been an additional source of income for farmers. In the literature on the subject (Parzonko & Sieczko, 2015; Balińska & al., 2014; Krzyżanowska, 2013), it is stressed that although agritourism is not an economic activity according to the Polish law, it greatly contributes to the development of entrepreneurship, especially among women, enables farmers to raise their qualifications, makes it possible to preserve rural cultural heritage, as well as offers a chance to prevent young people from leaving farms.

Agritourism is not only an opportunity to stimulate/enliven rural areas economically, but also a way to propagate ecological thinking and respect natural environment (Uglis & Jęczmyk, 2009). It is a form of tourism, which makes it possible to protect natural and cultural heritage, enforces improvement and development of infrastructure, as well as improves prospects for the future. It prevents extensive changes in the natural environment and in the functioning of local rural communities, which inhabit areas visited by tourists. What is more, agritourism

contributes to the development of sustainable tourism and facilitates the implementation of sustainable development in rural areas.

4 Conclusions

In Poland, slow tourism is a new idea but it is gaining in popularity among tourists, especially those coming from large cities. It is a style of travelling which, due to the elimination of haste, enables them to make authentic contact with the environment and achieve peace of mind. The conception well embraces the form of resting offered by agritourism farms, enabling the visitors to stay longer and develop mutual contacts.

Slow tourism is a form of recreation which allows the participants to develop authentic and profound relationships with the countryside inhabitants, places, local culture and food, heritage and natural environment. On the one hand, this form of tourism offers tourists the possibility of slow rest, allows them to get to know the local community and its culture and customs, while on the other – it enables farming families to earn additional income from renting accommodation and selling extra tourist-recreational services, or local products.

There are many similarities between slow tourism / agritourism and sustainable, responsible tourism or eco-tourism. This type of recreation gives a range of permanent benefits to all the parties involved.

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