

AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF AGRITOURISM IN REVITALIZING RURAL AREAS – THE CASE STUDY OF SOUTH- EAST POLAND

Introduction

At present times tourism is becoming one of major branches of the world's economy. It provides substantial revenue in budgets of many countries and regions.

Different problems of rural areas are becoming very popular in scientific researches¹. The main reason of that is fact that 56% of population in 27 EU countries live in rural areas. Besides, rural areas concern 91% of total territory of all EU countries.

Rural development can be defined in general terms as an overall increase in the welfare of the residents of rural areas and, more generally, as the contribution that rural resources offer to the welfare of the entire rural population². To gain sustainable development, farmers and other organizations have started organizing themselves spontaneously in rural networks in order to solve their problems and those of rural areas. New and alternative business have been developed to improve farms revenue streams and to develop new consumer market³. One of the branches of development in rural areas is tourism. Tourism in rural areas is perceived an important option as it provides farmers with an additional source of income. Polish rural areas have a high potential for the development of new forms of tourism. One of them is agritourism. It is regarded as an alternative form of tourism, closely connected with agriculture and operating in active farms, thus mainly in rural areas⁴. Agritourism business activities are performed mostly by farmers themselves or in collaboration with other village residents. Local, regional and central governments support agritourism by implementing rural areas development policies.

The main aim of this paper is an analysis of the agritourist phenomenon in Poland and evaluating of its potential for village renewal and revitalization. The author presents the results of research and implementation works, concerning the possibility of introduction

¹ N.O. Iyilikci, *The suggestion of an economic growth model: the analysis of production in ancient rural settlement*, „European Scientific Journal” 2016, special edition.

² I.D. Hodge, *The scope and context of rural development*, „European Review of Agricultural Economics” 1986, 13(3), p. 271–282.

³ A.P. Volpentesta, S. Ammirato, *Networking agrifood SMEs and consumer groups in local agribusiness*, Pro-VE'08: Pervasive Collaborative Networks, „IFIP International Federation for Information Processing” 2008, 283, p. 33–40.

⁴ N.G. McGehee, *An agritourism systems model: a weberian perspective*, „Journal of Sustainable Tourism” 2007, 15(2), p. 111–124.

in Polish conditions of village renewal programs. The paper is of a theoretical-application nature, using results of empirical identification. In details, the paper is organized as follows. In section 2 the theoretical background of the study is summarized in order to have a fully understanding of the survey. Survey results and discussion are presented in section 3 followed by conclusion in section 4.

Theoretical background

The concept of revitalization of rural areas is linked back to individual cultural features of the village, its customs and local history. In addition to rural renewal programmes, revitalization of rural space is related to the restoration and presentation of traditional rural buildings.

In that paper special attention was paid to Polish rural areas. The development of rural areas is becoming more and more important key problem, because these areas concern 93,2% of Polish territory and nearly 14 810 thousand of total number of inhabitants, which is 38,8% of population in this country.

Thanks to the membership in the EU, the model of multifunctional development of rural areas became established in Poland. Its implementation was reduced to the diversification of economic activity. The first step is process of recognition of the value in rural area and creating the need for revitalization. The essence of village renewal is the inclusion of the local community for the implementation of projects for the benefit of their village. The Programme of the Village Renewal (PoVR) is a popular well-known tool of rural development in European countries like: Austria, Germany (especially Bavaria), Ireland, Netherlands, later in Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia⁵.

The main objective of the Programme of Village Renewal is to retain life in the village, to increase its standard with the preservation of its identity. Participation of village citizens in the process of PoVR targets implementation is an important part of PoVR.

The agritourist phenomenon is often discussed by different scientists who represent various scientific disciplines. The scale of operation of the enterprises that provide agritourism is very important in assessing their economic, social and environmental impacts at the area level. Two main aspects are often considered. One of them is the issue of economic success in the individual agritourism enterprises. The other one is the scale of operation.

The success of the enterprises that provide the product can vary from the unsuccessful to successful and competitive ones. Success is relative, as it may refer to different enterprises while taking into account the particularities of the sector or the area. It can involve viable or competitive and profitable processing or marketing enterprises, but can also involve enterprises that are not viable as separate enterprises, but provide their owners with additional income in pluri-active farm households⁶. The scale of operation can vary

⁵ B. Bramwell, *Sustainability and rural tourism policy in Britain*, „Tourism Recreation Research” 1991, 16(2).

⁶ T. Kizos, A. Dalaka, T. Petanidou, *Farmers' attitudes and landscape change: evidence from the abandonment of terraced cultivations on Lesvos, Greece*, „Agriculture and Values” 2010, 27(2), p. 199–212.

from the very small to the very large and is again relative and related to the size of the sector locally, as large scale for one area may be small for another. The combination yields a number of different cases with a range of scales of operation and relative successes. Mapping the enterprises in an area provides a first rough estimation of the impacts at the area level (fig. 1). Adaptation of this approach to specific localities with specific ways to measure success and scale of operation can offer a more complete picture.

The revitalization of rural areas programmes include different scope of actions⁷. The most important are:

- shaping of public space,
- projects related to the objects of cultural functions,
- supporting the development of infrastructure,
- improving local conditions of life,
- protection of cultural heritage,
- improving economic development and environmental protection.

Village renewal in all EU countries is based on an article 20 of the Regulation EU No 1305/2013 adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on Support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development.

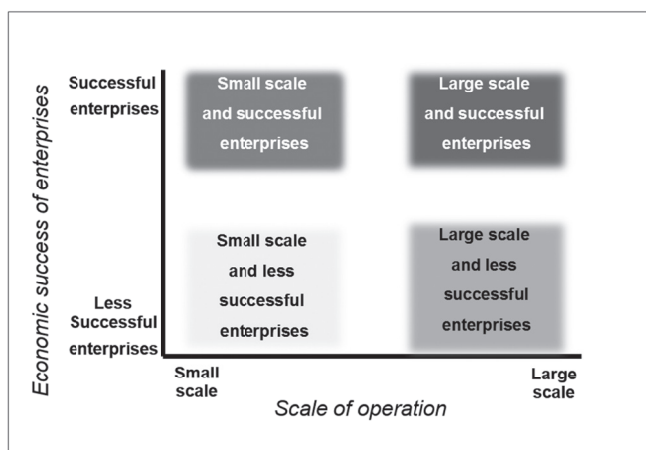


Fig. 1. Theoretical categories of the impact of agritourism enterprises on the area based on the economic success of enterprises and scale of operation

Source: adapted from T. Kizos, H. Vakoufaris, *Alternative agri-food geographies? Geographic indications in Greece*, „Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie” 2011, 102(2), p. 707.

Local authorities and inhabitants have a large role in the realization of village renewal and revitalization programmes. Local government provide support in different forms. The

⁷ A. Gilg, *Introduction to rural geography*, Edward Arnold, London–New York, 1991.

most popular are: employment of specialists for the development and realization of projects, animation of formulating the main vision of village renewal and provision of subsidies from the different sources.

The exploration of definitions and conceptualizations provides a rough guide to the type of approach taken to map agritourism as an economic activity, a social practice and a growing industry⁸. Relevant studies tend to focus on agritourism supply (e.g. Flanigan et al.⁹, Flanigan et al.¹⁰, McGehee¹¹, McGehee, Kim¹², McGehee et al.¹³, Nickerson et al.¹⁴, Tew, Barbieri¹⁵, McGehee⁴). In general, most of the available research is related to the types of farms and the services and products offered. Less research considers agritourism demand¹⁶. These authors discuss the expectations of rural tourists in order to suggest strategies for hosts to meet these expectations. Even fewer studies address both supply and demand, a notable exception being the work of Flanigan et al.¹⁷ and Flanigan et al.¹⁸. They adapt a typology offered by Philips et al.¹⁹ for defining agritourism with the use of three main criteria:

- the nature of contact between tourists and agricultural activity (the tangibility of agriculture in the context of visitor experiences of agritourism),
- whether or not the product is based on a “working farm” (the most frequently cited requirement for agritourism for both North American and European studies,
- the degree of authenticity in the tourism experience.

With the use of these criteria, five different types of agritourism emerge (fig. 2).

⁸ C. Gil Arroyo, C. Barbieri, S.R. Rich, *Defining agritourism: a comparative study of stakeholders' perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina*, „Tourism Management” 2013, 37(1), p. 39–47.

⁹ S. Flanigan, K. Blackstock, C. Hunter, *Agritourism from the perspective of providers and visitors: a typology based study*, „Tourism Management” 2014, vol. 40.

¹⁰ S. Flanigan, K. Blackstock, C. Hunter, *Generating public and private benefits through understanding what drives different types of agritourism*, „Journal of Rural Studies” 2015, 41(1), p. 129–141.

¹¹ N.G. McGehee, *An agritourism systems model: a weberian perspective*, „Journal of Sustainable Tourism” 2007, 15(2), p. 111–126.

¹² N.G. McGehee, K. Kim, *Motivation for agri-tourism entrepreneurship*, „Journal of Travel Research” 2004, 43(2), p. 161–170.

¹³ N.G. McGehee, K. Kyungmi, G.R. Jennings, *Gender and motivation for agritourism entrepreneurship*, „Tourism Management” 2007, 28(1), p. 280–289.

¹⁴ N.P. Nickerson, R.J. Black, S.F. McCool, *Agritourism: Motivations behind farm/ranch business diversification*, „Journal of Travel Research” 2001, 40(1), p. 19–26.

¹⁵ C. Tew, C. Barbieri, *The perceived benefits of agritourism: the providers' perspectives*, „Tourism Management” 2012, 33(1), p. 215–224.

¹⁶ A. Fotiadis, C. Vassiliadis, *Rural tourism service quality in Greece*, „e-Review of Tourism Research (e-RTR)” 2010, 8(4), p. 69–84.

¹⁷ S. Flanigan, K. Blackstock, C. Hunter, *Agritourism from the perspective of providers and visitors: a typology based study*, „Tourism Management” 2014, vol. 40.

¹⁸ S. Flanigan, K. Blackstock, C. Hunter, *Generating public and private benefits through understanding what drives different types of agritourism*, „Journal of Rural Studies” 2015, 41(1), p. 129–141.

¹⁹ S. Phillip, C. Hunter, K. Blackstock, *A typology for defining agritourism*, „Tourism Management” 2010, 31(6), p. 754–758.

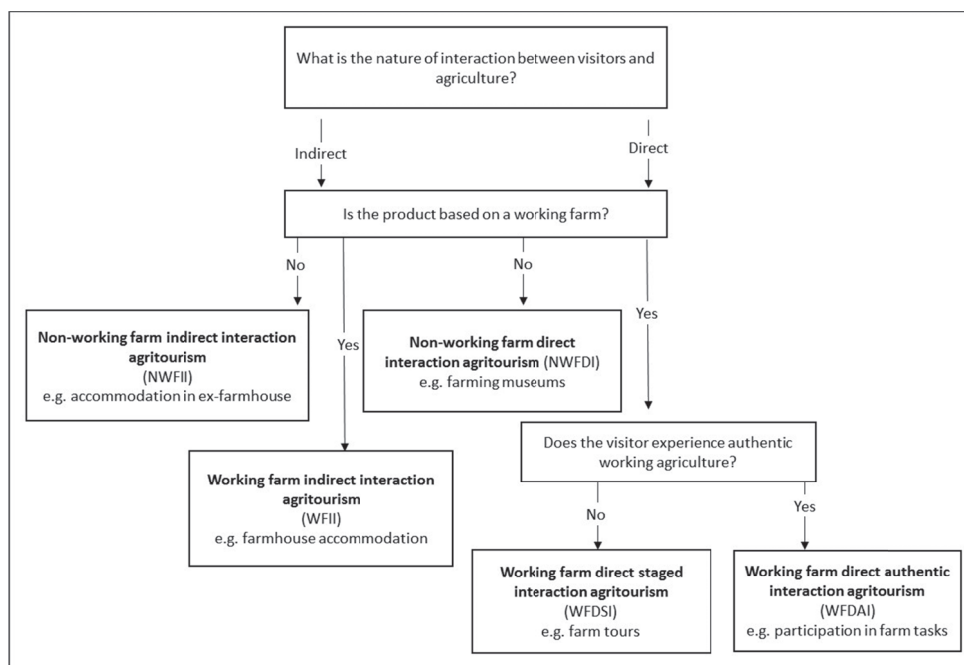


Fig. 2. A typology for defining agritourism

Source: adapted from S. Flanigan, K. Blackstock, C. Hunter, *Agritourism from the perspective of providers and visitors: a typology based study*, „Tourism Management” 2014, vol. 40; S. Flanigan, K. Blackstock, C. Hunter, *Generating public and private benefits through understanding what drives different types of agritourism*, „Journal of Rural Studies” 2015, 41(1).

In this article some results of an exploratory survey conducted among farms of south-east rural region in Poland are proposed²⁰. The main aim of an exploratory researches was to understand if and how farmers and rural actors exploit agritourism potential as a mean to revitalize the rural areas. The aim is also to highlight the presence of agritourism rural networks in the surveyed region where rural actors operate together with agritourism farms for the sustainable development of rural areas.

The research questions were defined as follow:

Research Question 1: Do farmers understand the importance of setting agritourism activities within their farms?

Research Question 2: Is it possible to highlight the presence of an agritourism rural network in supporting the activities of the agritourism farms?

The methodology was designed to address the research questions to the farmers in all south-east region of Poland. It is one of the less developed regions, not only in Poland, but also in all European Union. The methodology was made up of the following steps:

²⁰ The similar research was proposed by Ammirato and Felicetti (2017) in 2012 in Calabria (Italy).

1. Determine the overall number of agritourist farms in the region and how many of these businesses are currently active and offer an agritourism experience.
2. Definition of a questionnaire to be delivered to the owners of the agritourism farms. Responses to the questionnaire were analyzed to answer the research questions.
3. Delivery of the questionnaire to the owners of the farms and gathering of their filled forms.
4. Analysis of the owners' responses of the sample in order to answer the research questions and discussion.

Survey results and discussion

The proposed methodology has applied to the agritourism farms located in the south-east part of Poland. The researches have been carried out in summer in 2015. The south-east Poland is "lagging region" (i.e. a European Union region with measured per capita GDP, one of the lowest in whole EU).

In step 1 of the methodology, an official agritourism database was used from GUS (General, official agritourism farms registry). The number of Polish farms offering some forms of agritourism experience was rapidly increasing at the beginning of XXI century (mainly to 2005). The researches in 110 communes in the south-east Poland (the podkarpackie, małopolskie, lubelskie and świętokrzyskie voivodeship) made up 607 active, agritourism farms.

According to step 2, a questionnaire was set up containing 25 questions. The questionnaire was designed to answer many interesting questions. Only some of them could answer the research questions. For each farms belonging to measured group a person taking part in the researches tried to have a phone meeting or e-mail contact with the owner of the farm to deliver the questionnaire. On 940 agritourism farms 607 of them (nearly 65%) agreed to answer the questionnaire.

At the end of step 3 the final sample was made up. According to step 4, for each of the farms in the sample, the gathered responses and statistical results were analyzed. They are reported in the next section of this paper.

To answer Research Question 1, the quantitative results from official statistical data and qualitative results from made survey can be put in contrast. First data point out that few are the agritourism farms in the south-east part of Poland. Looking at the statistical analysis of questionnaires in the sample, 59% of respondents affirmed that over half of the overall farm's yearly turnover come from the agritourism activities. Looking at the costs side, 27% of respondents declared that more than 50% of the farm's costs come from the agritourism activities. Moreover, 56% of respondents affirm that they will increase the investments in the agritourism activities in the following year, with respect to the previous year, while only 6% of them want to reduce the investments. The small number of agritourism farms suggests that answer to RQ 1 cannot be positively.

To answer Research Question 2, it is important to note that statistical analysis of responses of the sample point out that:

- 52% of respondents declared they have some kinds of cooperation with other actors of the rural network,
- 41% of respondents declared that more than 30% of the agrifood products utilized in their agritourism activities come from other actors of the rural network. Only 36% stated they utilized only agrifood products self-produced.
- 52% of respondents who utilize products supplied from the rural network, affirmed to have long-term contracts with the other actors of the rural networks.

The researched data show the emergence of real agritourism rural networks in Poland. The rural communities have benefits from the agritourism presence mainly for agrifood producers, which received direct benefits from long-term contract. Also local workers are engaged for the agritourism services offered to tourists.

Conclusions

The agritourism activities are taken only by some Polish farms. The tourist services give owners of farms an alternative way for selling farms' products and getting different benefits. At present rural communities understand the benefits from direct connection with agritourism customers. Contacts between agritourists and rural community actors can give benefits both to the agritourism farms and the rural communities. Stable rural networks exist within the orbit of the Polish agritourism farms.

The analysis of database show the picture of the most agritourism rural network model in Poland. It is characterized by following features:

- the agritourism farms represents the hub of the rural network,
- the direct contact between elements of rural network creates tourist demand,
- thanks to long-term contacts between the farms and local suppliers, it is offered to the customers/tourists different goods and services,
- such connections and provisions contribute to enrich and complete the variety of rural offer to the tourists,
- local workers benefit from employment opportunities at the farm site.

The results are encouraging in supporting agritourism activities because of the importance of setting agritourism farms. The agritourism activity can give benefits both for farms and for the rural community. Because of that the agritourist phenomenon can be treated as a mean to revitalize the rural areas.

The similar research should be done in different rural areas in Poland.

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Abstract

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The author presents the results of research and implementation works, concerning the possibility of introduction in Polish conditions of village renewal programs. The paper is of a theoretical-application nature, using results of empirical identification. Some results of an exploratory survey conducted among farms of south-east rural region in Poland are proposed in this article. The main aim of the exploratory researches was to understand if and how farmers and rural actors exploit agritourism potential as a mean to revitalize the rural areas. The author also highlights the presence of agritourism rural networks in the surveyed region where rural actors operate together with agritourism farms for the sustainable development of rural areas.

Key words: revitalization of rural areas, agritourist function, rural renewal programmes

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