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## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT OF AGRITOURISM IN POLAND AND LOCAL COMMUNITY POTENTIAL

**Key words:** agritourism, local community, Poland, development, income.

### ABSTRACT

The article presents results of a comprehensive study carried out in the Region of Wielkopolska in Poland. The subjects included guest farms owners, local entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens. The research was to examine the relationship between the development of agritourism and the potential of a local community. At present there are approximately 450 agritourist farms in Wielkopolska. A questionnaire survey was carried out in villages with the best conditions for the development of agritourism and in a large number of working agritourist farms. 765 standardized face-to-face interviews were conducted. The structure of the sample reflected the structure of the local community in terms of respondents' sex, age and level of education. Additionally, 100 local entrepreneurs were interviewed representing three types of business: non-agritourist lodging and catering, retail and public services. All farm owners were interviewed with the aid of standardized questionnaires. The research results were processed with a Chi Square independence test. The research showed that agritourism had a great impact on the level of development of country dwellers, especially on their level of education, continual education, manners and openness to people. The owners of agritourist farms are better educated than people who do not run such business. Also a directly proportional correlation was observed between the perceived positive impact of agritourism on some aspects of life and the level of education; and an inversely proportional correlation between this influence of agritourism and the interviewees' age. Following the example of people involved in the agritourist business can enhance the potential of the local community and simultaneously stimulate the development of the countryside. This is also the essence of efficient and successful civil society. Thus a significant feedback between the local community potential and the outcomes of agritourism can be observed. Provision of agritourist services is only made possible when the residents of rural communities have appropriate supplies at their disposal. Also a directly proportional correlation was observed between the perceived positive impact of agritourism on some aspects of life and the interviewees' level of education. There was also an inversely proportional correlation between this perception and the interviewees' age. Agritourism raises the prestige of the countryside and gives people satisfaction of belonging to a local community. It also stimulates the activities of local inhabitants. However, as the study results show, the impact of agritourism on the lifestyle and life quality of local people depends on demographic features, in particular, on education and age.

### INTRODUCTION

The article presents results of a comprehensive study carried out in the Region of Wielkopolska, Poland. The subjects included lod-

ging cottages owners, local entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens. The research was aimed at showing the relationship between the development of agritourism and the potential of a local community.

Since Poland's accession to the European Union the rural communities have been challenged to take active part in continual education programs to be able to conform to and implement European quality standards. The basis for successful agritourism in Europe is cooperation between communes aimed at providing agritourist products mostly of local brands and supplementary recreational services. At the same time the important thing is not to concentrate only on maximizing the number of tourists, but also on diminishing the income-related polarization of society.

The line of demarcation between rural tourism and agritourism is somewhat blurred. The term rural tourism is applied in the widest sense to cover a broad range of activities developed in rural areas, directly related to the supply of services and experiences in tourist and leisure activities. Rural tourism is based on the rural environment in general, whereas agritourism is based on the farm and farmer [1, 2, 9, 13, 16]. This means that within the framework of rural tourism, agritourism enterprises are more closely related to agriculture than other rural tourism businesses.

Spending leisure time in a hospitable cottage has a long tradition in Poland. It was quite popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century to spend holidays in the Podhale region among the highlanders. In 1937 the tourist cooperative society "Gromada" was the first to introduce organized forms of recreation in Poland. After World War Two spending free time in the countryside could no longer compete with mass forms of tourism, sponsored by state-owned companies and social and political organizations. The revival of countryside recreation took place in the 1960s in the form of individually arranged holidays. In the 1990s the term agritourism came to signify this type of leisure pursuits.

There were a few reasons behind the revival of vacations spent in the Polish countryside [15, 17]. The demand for agritourism derived from people's need to escape from the city life to seek refuge in the countryside and to experience natural and cultural attractions. Agritourism started to develop in Poland following the economic transformations in the 1990s which brought about a high level of unemployment in the Polish countryside. The development of agritourism is evolutionary and displays considerable local diversity. Initially, agritourism was based on renting low standard rooms in primitive cottages without any extra facilities or services. It started to change in the early

1990s. Agritourism in present-day Poland is benefiting from European funds. Poland has a good state of natural environment and is widening its recreational offers and the range of supplementary services.

In Poland there are over 7 thousands lodgings offering over 70 thousands of beds [7]. Yet agritourism is still far less important to Polish economy than tourism in general. The number of agritourist farms is on the rise, but it is still no more than 1 percent of all farms in Poland. The revenue from agritourist farms makes up approximately 20-35% of all revenue from agriculture [16]. The WTO has made an optimistic forecast of a 25% rise of interest in countryside tourism in eastern and central Europe. Those estimates are also important indications that the market for such form of recreation is expanding [18, 19].

To meet the demands of more and more conscious consumers, the agritourist market makes the most of quality as an important competition factor. An example of quality control at the country level is a categorization of lodgings offered by the guest farms, which was introduced by the Polish Federation of Country Tourism "Hospitable Farms". Its main task is not only to set up accommodation standards, but also to enforce improvement of quality of services offered by the farm owners. The aim of this categorization is also unification of tourist farm marking and creation of unambiguous, nationwide agritourist standards on the European quality level. The figures published by the federation show that between 1997 and 2003 only 1,300 farm owners agreed to assess their facilities in terms of their usability for agritourist purposes.

## METHODS

The main objective of this research was to examine the relationship between the development of agritourism and the potential of a local community, and the impact of agritourism on the revenues, lifestyle and life quality of rural population.

The research was carried out in Wielkopolska, which is a region of Poland characterised by diversified local economy, efficient farming and a well-developed services sector. Wielkopolska is a key example of a good relationship between economic development and local community potential. The inhabitants of Wielkopolska, benefiting from their geographical assets (the closeness of the border

with Germany, lake areas) and taking into account the necessity of transformation, have willingly taken up agritourist activities. The success of this enterprise is the constantly growing number of lodgings offered to tourists. At present there are approximately 450 agritourist farms in Wielkopolska.

In order to determine the influence of agritourism on the social and economic development of a local community, Wielkopolska communes, i.e. the lowest administrative units, were examined in terms of their agritourist attractiveness. The assessment was based on indicators which comprised the following assumptions:

- commune was chosen as the territorial unit for assessment;
- statistical data on the communes was taken from the Regional Data Bank of the Provincial Statistical Office and respective administrative offices of local authorities;
- as many characteristics of a commune as possible were taken into consideration to ensure the most precise commune rating;
- all those features were expressed as comparative ratios;
- the features were appropriately selected so they could be grouped together into components;
- indicators of the components should make up appropriate data for the calculation of a general synthetic ratio for the whole assessed area (commune).

On the basis of professional literature [3, 5, 17], it was assumed that the attractiveness of a commune is the resultant of three basic components:

1. development potential,
2. environmental potential,
3. social potential.

It was assumed that *development potential* was determined by means of the following indicators:

**ECONOMIC ACTIVITY** understood as the percentage of the employed in the services sector as compared to the total number of the employed,

**ACTIVITY OF THE LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT** reflected in the:

- income of a commune per one inhabitant in PLN,
- investment outlay of a commune per 1 inhabitant in PLN,

**PUBLIC ACTIVITY** reflected in the:

- election turnout (during a 2003 referendum),
- number of readers registered at public libraries per 1,000.00 inhabitants,

**QUALITY OF LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE** reflected as the:

- length of national roads in km as compared to the area of the commune (km<sup>2</sup>),
- number of inhabitants per 1 post office and 1 telecommunications office,
- residential area calculated as average usable area in sq m per person.

It was assumed that *environmental potential* (relevant to the development of agritourism) should be measured with the following indicators:

- (%) percentage of forests,
- (%) percentage of pastures and meadows as compared with the total area of the commune,
- (%) percentage of recreational areas as compared with the total area of the commune,
- (%) percentage of surface waters as compared with the total area of the commune,
- population density (number of inhabitants per 1 km<sup>2</sup>).

*Social potential* was determined using the following parameters:

- percentage of the unemployed as compared to the total population in the working age,
- economic activity index,
- ratio of demographic agility.

For the fact that each unit (commune) is characterised by a number of variables, a taxonomic method of “the measure of development” developed by Z. Hellwig [10] was used in the study. The measure is a synthetic value, which is the resultant of all the analysed variables; the value allows for rating units depending on their deviation from an artificially set development standard. The starting point of calculating the measure is to specify the research matrix. It comprised a number of indicators of different aspects of a studied community (commune). The next step was to differentiate the variables (stimulants and destimulants) of the research matrix. The adopted criterion was the way the indicators influenced the development of a studied administrative unit (commune). Indicators influencing the level of commune development in a positive (stimulating) way were called stimulants, whereas indicators inhibiting the development were called destimulators. The analysed indicators described different features of the communes and for this reason the standardisation of variables was needed. Next, the deviation from the set standard was measured for each commune. This allowed for rating the communes with respect to each of the three adopted components. To be able to assess

complete possibilities of agritourist development in the communes each unit (commune) was assigned points for its position in each of the three ratings. Points were assigned following the adopted principle that the higher the rating of a commune the lower the number of the assigned points (ranging from 1 to 208). On the basis of the calculated indicators and the conducted analyses it was assumed that communes which were assigned fewer than 150 points were the most attractive for development of agritourism. Out of 14 communes that met the criterion, two mixed (urban/rural) communes (Nowy Tomyśl, Wolsztyn) and two rural communes (Kobyła Góra, Wijewo) were selected. The selected units featured a similar number of existing agritourist farms as well as functioning agritourist farms associations. Then a survey was carried out among agritourist farm owners, local entrepreneurs and those who did not provide any agritourism services in the selected communes, between April and June 2005. The survey in the form of a standardised interview was carried out among all the agritourist farm owners. In the case of local entrepreneurs the survey was conducted on a sample of 100 business entities consisting of three

groups of subjects: non-agritourist accommodation facilities and catering services, retail, entertainment and services. The number of surveys conducted in a particular commune was proportional to the number of registered business entities and amounted respectively to: 18 surveys in Kobyła Góra, 10 surveys in Wijewo, 26 surveys in Nowy Tomyśl (excluding the town itself) and 46 surveys in Wolsztyn (excluding the town itself). In the case of the survey of general population, all the interviewees lived in the rural areas, and were aged at least 20. The age criterion was based on the data from the Main Statistical Office from the National Rural Census 2002 and contained information on the structure of the studied population with consideration given to three characteristics, i.e. age, education and gender, in each community. This way a population list of 22,194 inhabitants was drafted. The sample size was determined following the requirements of the statistical sampling theory. In order to determine the sample size, a pilot test was carried out which assumed the influence of agritourism upon the respondents' income as the basic criterion differentiating the analysed community. Because the tested characteristics were

**Table 1.** The number and structure of conducted surveys among the inhabitants of studied communes, including information on respondents' age, education and gender

<i>WOLSZTYN</i>						
	Age	Higher education M/F	Secondary education M/F	Vocational education M/F	Elementary education M/F	Total
	20-29	2/3	14/17	27/15	3/4	85
	30-39	2/3	9/11	24/13	4/5	71
	40-49	2/2	10/12	20/11	8/11	76
	≥50	2/3	7/9	17/9	31/44	122
TOTAL (354)		19	89	136	110	354
<i>WIJEWO</i>						
	20-29	0/0	2/4	7/4	0/1	18
	30-39	0/1	1/2	7/5	0/1	17
	40-49	1/0	1/2	6/3	1/1	15
	≥50	0/0	1/2	6/3	7/8	27
TOTAL (77)		2	15	41	19	77
<i>NOWY TOMYŚL</i>						
	20-29	1/1	8/10	16/9	2/3	50
	30-39	1/1	4/5	14/8	2/2	37
	40-49	1/1	4/6	12/7	4/6	41
	≥50	1/1	4/5	11/6	17/24	68
TOTAL (196)		8	46	83	60	196
<i>KOBYLA GÓRA</i>						
	20-29	1/1	5/8	7/4	2/2	30
	30-39	1/1	3/5	9/5	2/2	28
	40-49	0/1	4/6	8/5	3/3	30
	≥50	1/1	3/4	7/4	14/15	49
TOTAL (137)		7	38	49	43	137

M – male respondent, F – female respondent

qualitative, in order to determine the sample size the equation of the minimum sample size for a fraction was used, assuming the reliability rate at about 0.95 and that the maximum error at 0.02. The sample included 765 respondents. A quota-random sampling was used as the technique of sample selection because it was possible to apply the method in marketing research and the involved costs were acceptable. On the basis of the results of the census of rural communities made available by the communal offices, four villages were selected at random in each commune, where the interviews were held. This way the process of data collection ensured maximum dispersion of conducted interviews so that the responses were more objective and reliable. Next, the studied population was divided into quotas according to age, education and gender.

The collected data was statistically processed using MS Access and MS Excel. The differences between mixed (urban/rural) communes and rural communes were assessed using independence test and C-Pearson's test.

The processed data were used for identification and evaluation of the economic and social effects of agritourism development on the studied communes. Quota sampling enabled determination of the relationship between agritourism and commune development, which can be further used by other communes in the Wielkopolska Province, which are similar in terms of their population structure and environmental attractiveness. A comparative analysis of such results from other provinces in Poland will, however, require further research.

## RESULTS

The obtained results show that agritourism generates entrepreneurial attitudes among the countryside residents, especially those with a higher education. Between 15% and 22% of rural inhabitants consider a possibility of starting agritourist business. What is more, there is a weak correlation between the level of education and considering starting this kind of business. Most often, agritourism was regarded as a prospective business by respondents with a secondary (30.3%) and higher (19.4%) education, and the most seldom by respondents with an elementary education (15%). It should be added that the number of working

agritourist farms in every village had no effect on the percentage of respondents considering starting agritourist business. The interviews with local entrepreneurs revealed that for 9% of them the expected income from tourist services was a stimulus to start business activity. Once again the correlation between the education level and declared attitude was noted: the more residents with a higher education, the greater impact of agritourism on enterprise and quality of life in a given community.

The community potential consists of such components as social bonds, mutual trust among local community residents and their attitude towards the outsiders. Agritourism is a business requiring approval of family members to succeed. All the interviewed farm owners declared that their nearest (nuclear) family fully approved of their business. It is important as running such a lodging farm is connected with the owners' household, and thus has a great impact on family's lifestyle. Family's approval was the factor that was most often pointed out by the interviewees (39%), regarding the success of the enterprise.

The research revealed a connection between the respondents' level of education or age and their attitude toward tourists. A positive attitude towards tourists was displayed by respondents with a higher education (75%) and secondary education (61.7%), aged 40-49 years. A negative attitude was declared mostly by respondents who were 50 years and older and had a primary education. Additional calculations revealed a moderate correlation between the rural residents' attitudes toward tourists and a conviction that business had a positive influence on the farm owner and his family's income.

A negative attitude toward tourists was declared by people who were convinced that agritourism development had no impact on their income. People who noticed this impact and considered it positive, declared a positive (82%) or indifferent (8%) attitude. Therefore, it can be stated that indirect benefits from agritourism development influences the countryside's residents attitudes toward tourists. Those results corroborate the phenomenon of polarisation described in literature, which leads to desintegration of local communities [1, 4, 8, 9, 14, 15]. The research also showed that agritourism affected the civilizational level of country dwellers, and especially their level of education, continual education, manners or openness to people. The owners of guest farms are better educated than people who do not run such

business. A directly proportional correlation was observed between the perceived positive impact of agritourism on some aspects of life and level of education. There was also an inversely proportional correlation between this perception and the interviewees' age.

The following conclusions can be drawn:

- Agritourism opens up the possibility of cohabitation of city and country dwellers, and thus intermingling of urban and rural life styles.
- Agritourism raises the prestige of rural communities, makes people proud to belong to a local community and increases business activity of countryside residents.

However, as the study results show, the impact of agritourism on life style and life quality largely depends on demographic features, in particular, on inhabitants' education and age.

The immediate beneficiaries of agritourism are farms owners. The most common reason for starting an agritourist business is an opportunity to earn extra income. Among the studied farms 56% had a rise in income between 10-20%.  $\chi^2$  test showed that level of income did not depend on the farm owner's age and education level. Although incomes from agritourist services grow bigger and become a considerable part of the total income of guest farm owners, there is no correlation between the length of rendering such services and a rise in income. The evolution of agritourism from a complementary activity to an alternative source of income results from the high attractiveness of rural areas and/or decreasing profitability of agricultural production [2, 11]. This theory is verified by the results of the study, as the most often declared reason for discontinuing agrarian activities by farmers was too low income or total lack of profits from farming. For lodging farm owners who had given up farming activity, agritourism income accounted for 20% or 100% of total income. For those with 20% of their income from agritourism, quitting farming production was connected with taking up a new job or acquiring the rights to welfare benefits. For farms where agritourism is the basic and only source of income, agricultural production was maintained only for tourists or simply to preserve the farms' rural character. The question remains whether the income from agritourism is satisfactory to the farm owner, or, in other words, if agritourist services had a positive impact on the economic situation of the owner and his family. The study showed that 36% of guest

farm owners did not notice any improvement in their economic situation since taking up agritourism; however, 38% noticed a slight, and 26% a significant improvement. It can be stated then that their estimation of the economic situation resulting from agritouristic activity is the effect of confrontation of the primary ideas of efficiency of agritourist business with the reality. It is also not rare that farmers assess their economic success against their neighbors', instead of focusing on their own service capability. And it can also be assumed that, as in the case of most studies concerning satisfaction with the earned income, the declared income estimation could have been lowered by the interviewees.

The questionnaires revealed that 17% of respondents thought that the development of agritourism in their commune had a positive impact on their families' incomes. 25% of local entrepreneurs thought that that development of agritourism in their commune had a positive impact on their incomes. Because all the three groups of respondents: guest farms owners, rural residents not involved in agritourism and entrepreneurs demonstrated that agritourism had affected their income, it can be expected that agritourism also indirectly influences the commune's revenue through taxation. Since rendering agritourist services is mostly tax-free in Poland, it is impossible to determine how much of the tax paid by entrepreneurs come from servicing tourists and how much agritourism affects the local budgets. It can be, however, stated that providing such services, on different levels in different areas, has a positive effect on the budget of rural communities. The communes benefit from agritourism and other related enterprises by reducing budget expenditures on welfare and by activating the local community. Over 70% of rural residents declared that agritourism was or could be a substantial source of income for local budget.

The respondents' opinions on the impact of agritourism depend on their level of education and age. Rural inhabitants aged 30-39 with a higher education state most often (41.8%) that the development of agritourism in their commune increased the number of new jobs. The study revealed that the perception of agritourism as a generator of new workplaces is directly proportional to the respondents' level of education. 5% of the interviewed local entrepreneurs declared that agritourist services contributed to the rise of employment in their companies.

## DISCUSSION

The development of agritourism takes place in rural communities, characterized by specific mentality, different way of life and different customs of local residents. The rural way of life, which in Poland is marked with traditional behaviour, conservative opinions, religion-oriented system of attitudes and strong identification with the local community, can significantly restrain the development of agritourism. However, the community potential, the residents' initiative, tendency to organize themselves and cooperate, social bonds and mutual trust can all lead to taking up new forms of business, including agritourism. The process of imitation, that is following an entrepreneur who first successfully applied the new forms of business, can strengthen the community capital, and simultaneously stimulate the countryside development. This capital is also the essence of civil society, especially, of a developmentally efficient society. Thus a relationship between the community potential and agritourist activity can be observed. Providing agritourist services is only possible only when the rural residents have some ready community capital at their disposal. Thus it can be said that indirect advantages from agritourism influence rural residents' attitudes toward tourists. The results of this study corroborate the phenomenon of polarisation described in literature [1, 4, 8, 9, 14, 15], which leads to disintegration of a local community.

Agritourism affects the revenue of local communities [1, 2, 9, 13]. However, estimating the scale of this influence, due to difficulties in discrimination between agritourism and tourism and lack of information about agritourist services, is very difficult. Agritourism is not a big scale venture thus the achieved benefits, both for the guest farm owners and other inhabitants, are directly proportional to its size. According to the results of different studies benefits from agritourism can very rarely become an alternative to regular farming [2, 9, 12, 15, 16]. However, the transformations in Polish agritourism are an opportunity to increase the service quality and economic effectiveness of agritourist farms. Those changes also offer an opportunity to the local people and companies to reap benefits from agritourism. However, it should be kept in mind that the success of agritourism largely depends on effective removal of civilization barriers. Greater openness and initiative of local

communities will be definitely an important step forward.

The level of development of rural communities has also a big impact on planning tourist or para-tourist investments. The components of this development include the state of technical and service infrastructure, employment rate and structure, level of education, transport infrastructure and local government finances. The local authorities' task should be promotion of the vision of regional development that would attract tourist investments. The promotion would enhance investors' activities and make it easier to strike a balance between supply and demand for tourist services in particular rural areas. The results of the study show that undertaking coordinated and comprehensive actions aimed at increasing the number of tourists in the region, including visitors to agritourist farms, should encourage new investments in rural communities and enhance their tourist attractiveness.

The research revealed an impact of agritourism on the level of civilization development of country dwellers, their level of education, continual education, manners or openness to people. The owners of guest farms are better educated than people who do not run such business. A directly proportional correlation can be observed between the perceived positive impact of agritourism on some aspects of life and level of education. There is also an inversely proportional correlation between this perception and the interviewees' age. The transformations in Polish agritourism are an opportunity to increase the service quality and economic effectiveness of agritourist farms. Those changes give a possibility to include a larger number of local people and companies in agritourism by adding more diverse services to the tourist offer [2, 4, 11, 14, 16]. Agritourism has been treated in Poland as panacea to unemployment, which is indeed a big problem in rural communities. But it is difficult to regard it as an activity generating new jobs, as agritourism is mostly a self-sufficient business in which hired hands do not determine the efficiency of tourist services. However, agritourism can generate new jobs in the area of various para-tourist services. If those services are addressed not only to the guests spending nights in lodging cottages but to all kinds of tourists, then it is impossible to differentiate between the impacts of tourism and agritourism on creating new workplaces.

The successful development of agritourism in Poland does not only depend on the initiative of the owners of guest farms, but it relies mostly on the state of economic transformations in rural areas, on a possibility to gain essential, financial support for a planned or already run business activity, on the social and economic infrastructure of the commune and on the active involvement of local authorities. Equally important is the local community's potential. If the inhabitants of rural areas understand that they can all benefit from the development of agritourism, and activities aimed at development of agritourist identity of rural communities are properly coordinated by the local authorities or local associations, then agritourism in Poland can become a recreation showcase.

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