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RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND

ROZWÓJ TURYSTYKI WIEJSKIEJ W POLSCE

Key words: rural tourism, development, process

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka wiejska, rozwój, proces

Abstract. In many developing countries agriculture is vital for sustainable rural development and reorganized as a main means for reducing poverty and ensuring economic growth. Rural areas and agricultural fields are two concepts that usually used in lieu of each other. However, rural areas are multifunctional dynamic systems. They include different land use and activities such as settlement, transportation, industry, tourism and recreation. The paper presents agritourism as an alternative activity in the rural development process, which combines agriculture and tourism, improves natural resources, contributes the rural area socially and economically.

Introduction

Discussing key factors that slow down the development of rural areas in Poland, could be included ineffective structure of employment, low productiveness in agriculture in conversion to one employee, low level of services and industry development, low quality of human resources and low index of urbanization and engagement of foreign capital, as well as native Polish capital. These factors clearly show the following macro-economic data.

Participation of the agriculture, hunting and forestry in gross domestic product (GDP) of Poland systematically falls down. In 2001 it has amounted to only 2.9% – in spite of the fact that Poland has considerably higher number of workers in agriculture on the EU level. According to the research of activities in economic populations conducted by BAEL, in 2001 year 2.7 million of people worked in agriculture, hunting and forestry i.e. 19% of the total employed, but on the countryside 5.5 million people, i.e. 38.6% of the total employed people. In the individual agriculture self-employed there was 2.5 million people on average. Because the process of structural changes within the agricultural sector is very slow it is believed that this data is identical with small deviations for 2005 as well.

Analysing the above-mentioned data concerning the Polish agriculture and comparing it with the data from the other areas of European Union countries it is easy to say, that in Poland it is almost necessary to move majority of the rural population from agriculture to the trade service, but with maintaining their residing in the country area.

The representatives of local and council governments truly underline in their development strategies, that tourism and agro-tourism could be in the near future one of the key domains in national economy of Poland. Because agro-tourism is an active factor of social and economic development, source of condition for other domains of farming, it also promotes activity of urban/rural districts and economic regions and it represents an important element of politics and strategy of economic state, as well as international cooperation. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development estimated the total number of agro-tourism farms (farm-stays), rural tourism (rural home-stays) and eco-tourism accommodation in 2002 as 13 154 units, comprising 137 164 beds which accommodated 960 132 visitors (6.7% of total national overnight stays). Although growth within the accommodation sector in rural and agro-tourism increased significantly during 1990, subsequent decline continued until 2002, when significant increases were noted [Hegarty, Przezborska 2005].

The place of tourism within the strategies of urban and administrative districts development

Tourism is also an important factor of narrowing friendship between nations, as well as recognition of cultures and traditions of other nations. In the West Pomeranian province – only over 60% of urban/rural and administrative districts have indicated an increase in development of tourism and agro-tourism as a results of strategic factor for the rise of quality of life in the local community and its wealth. Unfortunately, the main disadvantage of tourist activity and agro-tourism is it's changing nature. This results from many grounds.

For the most important, it is possible to regard that tourist activity, in particular country tourism and agro-tourism, is based to a great extent on natural processes and unpredictable nature, which also depends on the time of year.

With this changing seasons in the tourist and agro-tourist services there are also cyclical movements of utilization of labour force. This is why inhabitants of villages during non-productive periods can deal with activities outside agriculture e.g. managing agro-tourism farms [Wiktorowski 2005].

Despite these difficulties resulting from the changing nature of seasons and concentrating on the association of tourism with other areas of economic sections we can notice multi functions and strong reaction of other sectors on operations of investment evoked by tourism.

First of all, it results from different aspects of tourism. When a tourist or a group of tourists arrives in particular area, they usually make shopping in local shops and they usually stay for the night in local hotel or B&B. At the same time this activates many different professions and social functions in the place of stay for recreation. Also institutions and local governments that want to earn from tourists undertake infrastructure investments in order to increase the attractiveness of the region. In consequence it increases the number of different jobs for local businesses. At the same time it is rearranged on new work places.

The West Pomeranian province has been experiencing for many years now a period of changing of circumstances and major decrease in economic activities. This is mainly caused by high unemployment, which is one of the highest in Poland – currently it represents over 27%, but in some administrative districts it exceeds even 40% or it is just about this measure. According to data of the job centre in Szczecin on 1st of May 2007 the unemployment was: – in Lobs district 38.6%, in Drawsko district – 36.9%, in Swidwin district – 38.1%, in Białogard district – 48.8%, in Koszalin district – 42.2%, in Gryfice district – 42.7%, in Sławno district – 46.6%, in Pyrzyce district – 39%, in Szczecin district 42.2% and in Choszczno district – 34.6% [Statistical Office in Szczecin]. Rural areas suffer from the problems of high unemployment at least to the same extent as urban areas. Frequently the problems are more severe due to the decline in manufacturing in general but also a fall in levels of agricultural development. Technological advances have contributed to this decline. In addition, agricultural policies aimed at high production levels of specific crops have influenced the level of employment in rural areas. Attractive rural areas has become the focus of farmland speculation again leading to diminishing employment [Morison 1987].

The growth rate of the West Pomeranian province is considerably low than national average and the region's economy has smallest contribution of fabricating GDP in Poland (decrease from 4% in 1998 to 3% in 2003). This resulted from marginalization and decline of traditional economic functions in the Western Pomeranian, linked with marine economy, low innovation of the region and also the uneven allocation of output factors. First of all, they are concentrated within two industrial agglomerations: one in Szczecin and one in Koszalin, and also in three administrative districts around Szczecin. The southern and the eastern part of province are characterized by very low degree of industrialization and economic stagnation. It results from many problems from the past (ie. lack of infrastructure, economic multi functions and a low level of quality in human resources) on top of which socio-economic transformations have been imposed on.

Natural resources are the main benefits of these less developed areas, which provide balanced development in many directions. However, the weaker part of the most delayed administrative districts in development is the labour market and the condition of infrastructure and technology, which is not developing. Low competitiveness of economic subjects acting on local markets is the biggest threat for development in these parts of Western Pomeranian, by having difficulties with keeping existing purchasers and also attracting new ones. There are also other strong threats for

development of the south-east administrative district in the region such as: lack of traditional enterprise in local community, lack of cooperation in the name of common interest, low education level of population, inaction of majority inhabitants, increasing social problems related with pathologies like alcoholism, crime, conflicts with neighbours, depression, inheriting of unemployment. In the restructuring process of economy in rural areas, one of the most obvious effects is the necessity to create job opportunities alternative to agricultural sector. In this respect agro-tourism is a valued option protecting the rural environment, sustaining small-sized enterprises and providing income and job opportunities.

Tourism on rural areas as a chance of development

Tourism is one way to entourage the diversification of rural economic activities [Bramwell 1994, Hunek 2000]. Rural tourism is one of the main priorities of tourism development in many European countries, including Poland. The market for rural holidays is grooving at the same time as the future of many rural regions is uncertain, due to changes in agriculture practice (including effects of the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU) or the increasing attractiveness of urban living standards. Rural tourism seems to be an appreciate tool to revitalise the declining rural areas and to ensure their sustainable future by job retention or even job creation, increased job diversity, service retention, farm support broadened cultural provision, landscape and nature conservation or the maintenance of rural arts. With particular regard to the rural undeveloped or declining areas, there is a tendency to approach tourism that will provide an economic panacea for development of rural regions. Rural enterprises have a relatively good basis from which to provide tourist service. Rural areas are visually dominated by agrarian and forest based economic activities. Land – use patterns, economic demands, and technological innovations in agriculture and forestry are the main reasons for visual changes in the rural landscape. The landscape which in itself attracts many tourists, is adversely affected if, for example, too many farmers stop farming [Tyrvanen et al. 2001].

According to Hunek [2000], country areas can spread out dynamically miscellaneous forms of activities taking advantage, miscellaneous forms of activities maximizing profitable utilization stock and values that owns given field. Basic determinant of rural area development, also administrative districts of weakly developing Western Pomeranian region, connection of traditional agricultural activity is with other spheres productive extra agricultural, also in area of touristic movement on villages. When governments and the tourism industry wish to develop new regions for tourism, they are increasingly considering rural areas, which, until now, have been little developed for tourism. Local authorities and other bodies throughout Europe are considering rural tourism as a key part of local development, usually with a specific focus on the use of the local heritage [Roberts, Hall 2001].

Rural tourism, agritourism and active tourism in particular are directly connected to rural areas. As pointed out by Hall, well- integrated, rural tourism can provide an important complement and counterbalance to coastal mass tourism that has characterised many countries with warm climates such as in south and south eastern Europe. Reflecting a broader recognition of the relationships between tourism and development, a number of papers addressed strategies for developing sustainable rural tourism, although those by Greffe [1994] and Gannon [1994] consider most explicitly tourism's role in economic and social development. According to Greffe [1994], there are five reasons why „the authorities” should intervene in the development of rural tourism, these being the protection of potentially attractive areas, the modernisation of supply structures, marketing, training and the widening of opportunities for participation in rural tourism.

Rural tourism has not attracted as much research interest as other aspects of tourism. In particular, there is a dearth of detailed information concerning environmental valuations. Vague statement such as „fresh air, healthy environment and pure nature” are not enough. Without detailed information concerning the desired characteristics of landscape, it is difficult to plan investments in environmental management in rural tourism provision and to develop marketing campaigns. Tourism alone cannot save the countryside, it offers an option worthy of consideration in traditional agriculture struggling with structural change. The present status of farm tourism seems to be firm, because tourists are devoted to the form of travel they have chosen; elderly clients are more likely to spend their holidays in rural areas. Future more, there is considerable interest among people who have not previously taken a rural holiday to consider rural tourism as

one possibility. In addition, young people seem to be taking an interest in farm and nature tourism. Therefore, a substantial increase in the provision of rural holiday service is a realistic aim [Tyrvanen et al 2001]. Agro-tourism is becoming part of the wider trend of expanding rural tourism which is increasing in popularity in many countries. The relationship between tourism and agriculture is complex and can range from conflict to coexistence [Telfer, Wall 1996, Telfer 1996]. Rural tourism has been increasing in demand in Europe with many regions opting for rural tourism development [Lowyck, Wanhill 1992].

Conclusion

Rural tourism in Poland has tradition going back to the 19th century. It seems to be an appropriate tool to revitalise the declining rural areas and to ensure their sustainable future by job retention and creation, increased job diversity, service retention, farm support, broadened cultural provision, landscape and nature conservation or the maintenance of rural arts and crafts as tourist attraction.

The most important resources identified as valuable for the development of Polish rural tourism are authentic rural lifestyles with traditional agriculture, a rich and unpolluted environment, and high quality of food and hospitality, and it is estimated that 65% of Poland fulfils the criteria to develop rural tourism.

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Streszczenie

W pracy podjęto próbę analizy rozwoju turystyki wiejskiej w Polsce. Wskazując na wielofunkcyjny wpływ na gospodarkę krajów, jak i na rozwój obszarów wiejskich. Rosnące zainteresowanie wypoczynkiem na wsi, również w Polsce, sprzyja rozwojowi tej formy działalności. Agroturystykę ukazano jako alternatywną formę aktywizacji obszarów wiejskich, poprawiającą sytuację dochodową, przyczyniającą się do zmniejszenia bezrobocia.

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