

MANAGEMENT OF AGROTOURISM IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS WITH THE EXAMPLE OF THE MAIOPOLSKIE VOIVODESHIP

Arkadiusz Niedziółka

Agricultural University in Krakow, Poland

ABSTRACT

Agrotourism is a form of rural tourism that is based on the qualities of the natural and cultural environment. For this reason, this kind of tourism is particularly useful for implementing principles of ecological development and should be a permanent element of the sustainable development of rural areas.

In the opinion of s of the surveyed Commune Office employees, agrotourism can have a considerable to medium impact on the development of a commune (in almost all the communes, this was put down in Development Strategies). At the same time, the respondents underlined the extremely important role of environmental protection and reasonable utilization of the environment in the development of agrotourism services.

In the issues of agrotourism management based on the principles of sustainable development, an important role is played by the commune's local authorities and the local community. Their entrepreneurship has a great impact on the development of this form of tourism, taking into account the aspects of environmental protection and the maintenance of the cultural heritage of the places visited.

Unfortunately, the greatest barrier to the future development of agrotourism services is the financial barrier, as was indicated in more than 70% of communes. Farmers can apply for EU funds in order to expand the portfolio of their services (refund of the costs incurred), but even so, they have to have their own capital to begin with, which is often the main shortcoming of any investment.

Key words: agrotourism, sustainable development, rural areas

Introduction

The notion of *sustainable tourism* was used for the first time during a UN conference, referred to as the "Earth Summit", which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The idea of this form of tourist migration refers to the entire phenomenon connected with tourism and pertains both to the economic development of the population of the visited area and to issues related to environmental protection and the preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of tourist regions. In turn, during the international conference in the Canary Islands in 1995, the *International Declaration on Sustainable Tourism* was passed, setting forth the principles of tourism understood as such. The participants of the conference focused on the fact that tourism is an ambivalent phenomenon, as it can contribute to social, economic and cultural achievements, but on the other hand, it can cause degradation of the natural environment and loss of local identity [Gromkowski, 2004].

Various types of tourism can be distinguished within sustainable tourism. At the beginning of the 1990's in Poland, a new form of tourism in rural areas emerged, namely agrotourism. This new phenomenon is connected to the organisation of tourist stays at operational agricultural farms. Income from agrotourism services constitutes an additional source of sustenance for farmers, whose main profits come from agricultural production.

Agrotourism should be based on the principles of sustainable development of rural areas. An important issue for farmers, their families and the local community, besides the incomes of the farmers, is maintaining fundamental aspects of conservation of the natural environment. Tourist visits must not cause degradation of the areas visited. Therefore, it is of paramount importance not to exceed the tourist absorption capacity and to host a limited number of tourists in a given area.

The essence and characteristics of sustainable tourism

Agenda 21, developed for the countries of the Baltic Sea region, defines sustainable tourism as "any form of the development of tourism or tourist activity which respects the environment, provides long-term protection of natural and cultural resources, and which is socially and economically acceptable and fair". [Przezbyrska, 2000]. Thus, the detailed objectives of the development of tourism as such refer to three main elements: environment, economy and the individual. In view of the above, the development of sustainable tourism has three principal objectives, namely: economic benefits for the local community, improvement of the quality of life of the local community and protection of the natural environment.

Sustainable tourism is in opposition to traditional tourism, referred to as mass tourism, which violates

the state of equilibrium in nature and has no regard for the requirements of the natural environment. Sustainable management in tourism entails, first of

all, economical management of natural environment resources and space as well as utilisation of the existing tourist and paratourist infrastructure (table 1).

Table 1. The difference between conventional and sustainable management of tourism development

Conventional management	Sustainable management
Unplanned tourist development	Planning first – then development
Each commune plans separately	Planning for entire regions
Disordered urban development – all over the place	Concentration of urban development, saving the land
Town architecture different from the local building style	Architecture typical for the surrounding area (form and raw materials)
Exploiting particularly valuable landscapes	Leaving particularly valuable landscapes intact
Building new infrastructure, new accommodation places	More effective utilization of the existing infrastructure
Leaving tourism development in the hands of outside promoters	Local population has the right to decide and participate in tourism
Taking into account economic benefits only	Carrying out an analysis of benefits and losses, with consideration for all the economic, ecological and social aspects
Creating a base for private vehicle traffic	Promoting public and alternative transport (e.g. bicycles, carts, sleighs)

Source: Zaręba D., *Ekoturystyka*, Warszawa 2006, p. 39.

There can be various forms of sustainable tourism in rural areas. M. Jalinik [2002] distinguishes four types of such tourism:

- rural tourism – covering all tourism organised in rural areas,
- agrotourism – tourism at agricultural farms,
- eco-agrotourism – tourism at farms which produce food using ecological methods,
- ecotourism – tourism in environmentally valuable and protected areas.

Currently, a lot of attention is devoted to agrotourism, as part of the sustainable development of rural areas and sustainable tourism. The key ecological features of this form of tourism are [Bia³obrzezka, Kisiel, Marks, 2000]:

- protection of the natural environment through the promotion of such forms of tourism which are economically productive, socially responsible and friendly to the environment,
- initiating tourism and agricultural activity that is adapted to the environment and the landscape,
- developing the production of food with raised ecological parameters,
- development of the infrastructure that supports the ecological patterns of tourism (transport, energy production, waste, sewerage and water management, etc.),
- maintaining the integrity of the landscape, cultural values and the attractiveness of the locality and the surrounding areas

Management in sustainable tourism

In the opinion of Gromkowski [2002], management of tourism in an environment of sustainable development requires compliance with certain rules, which include the protection and sustained utilization of natural, cultural and social resources, and an interdisciplinary approach to tourism management. Moreover, the author mentions long-term planning, consisting in the harmonization of tourism development plans with strategic solutions for most areas (commune, region, state), as well as the participation of the local economy and population in the development of tourism.

On the other hand, according to D. Zaręba [2006], the management of sustainable tourism in all sectors of the tourist industry comes down to four general principles:

- ensuring the protection and sustainable use of natural, cultural and social resources,
- an interdisciplinary approach to tourism management – the interests of various entities are involved in the development of tourism: state administration, local self-governments, entrepreneurs, NGOs, consumers and local community,
- long-term planning – will help foresee the consequences of the impact of tourism on the environment and plan preventive actions,
- support of the local economy and the participation of the local community in the development of tourism – the tourism in the region should be based

first of all on locally available resources and on the initiative of the local population, ensuring financial benefits to the inhabitants and caring for a broadly-understood quality of life (health, cleanliness, safety, etc.).

The tourism development strategy plays an important role in the management of tourism in line with the principles of sustainable development. The strategy of the development of tourism on a commune level is of particular importance in relation to the local tourist industry. It is defined as long-term (prospective) action plan, which establishes strategic objectives for the development of tourism and adopts such courses of action and an allocation of funds which are required for the attainment of objectives and tasks [Michałowski, Ziótkowski 2002]. Among the most popular types of strategies for the development of rural tourism, A. P. Wiatrak [2005] indicates the strategy of sustainable development. In the opinion of this author, that strategy consists in the mutual adjustment of political, social, cultural, economic, environmental, spatial, institutional, etc. aspects. [Wiatrak 2005]. Their foundation is comprehensiveness, which accounts for long-term development based on integrated governance.

Various entities participate in the management of agrotourism, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development of rural areas. The following can be distinguished among them: local authorities in the commune, Agricultural Consultancy Centres and agrotourism associations. Self-governments are responsible for developing the commune's development strategy. Such a strategy should account for widely-understood tourism, including agrotourism. Agrotourism services can have a prominent role in the sustainable tourism development strategy in a commune. In rural areas which are characterised by appropriate natural qualities and rich historical and cultural heritage, this type of tourism has great prospects for success.

Moreover, the inhabitants of villages who are not directly involved in the agrotourist product production process play an important role in the development of agrotourism. They have the opportunity to provide service to tourists in a given locality through the organisation of various recreational services, e.g. guided tours.

Results of the research

The research, whose results will be presented below, was conducted at the turn of July and August, 2006. The research included representatives of 57 Commune Offices in the Małopolskie Voivodeship.

From all the communes that participated in the research, 55 have an up-to-date Development

Strategy, and in two of them a strategy is currently being developed. Almost all of the existing Development Strategies – 53 – contain a SWOP analysis, mission and strategic vision for the development of tourism. As regards agrotourism issues, most strategies, in 51 communes, provide for actions supporting its development. In 26 communes, there are units or positions that deal with agrotourism. In 13 communes, there are plans for establishing similar units which will deal with agrotourism services, in one commune this has not yet been decided, and in 30 (30% of all the studied communes), there are no plans for creating such a position. This might result from the fact that in almost 1/3 of territorial self-governments, agrotourism services are not perceived as a factor which considerably contributes to local growth.

In the management of agrotourism in line with the principles of sustainable development of rural areas, a key role is played by local authorities in the commune. In questionnaire research, it was asked whether the involvement of local self-governments in the development of agrotourism in the commune is sufficient. More than half of the respondents (56.1%) answered "rather yes" and 14% "yes." 15.9% of the respondents found it hard to answer this question and 14% said "rather not."

The influence of the local self-government on the development of agrotourism services in particular communes was related to various actions, mainly in the field of promotional activity (47.4%), but also in the development of tourist and recreation infrastructure (19.3%) and the construction of technical infrastructure (12.3%) (table 2).

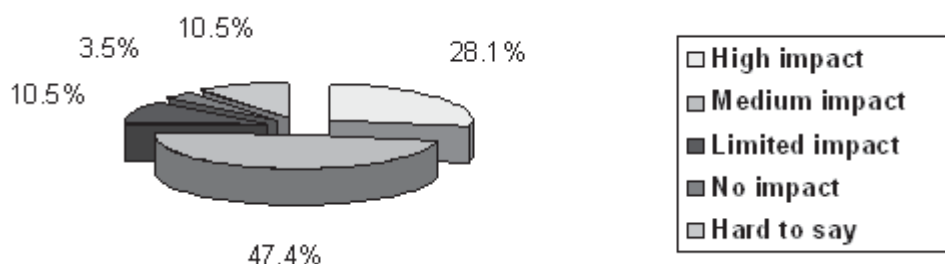
On the other hand, agrotourism services can have large impact on the social and economic development of the commune. The direct beneficiaries will be farmers who undertake agrotourism activity, but also, through the so-called multiplication effect, the local community and enterprises which operate in a given locality. In response to one of the questions from this group, almost 1/3 of the communes answered that the influence of the local self-government on the development of agrotourism is high. However, most responses – 27 (47.4%) – pertained to the limited impact of local authorities on the development of this type of tourism (drawing 1).

In the management of sustainable agrotourism, an important role is played by the entrepreneurship of the persons dealing with this form of tourism, their creativity, and willingness to cooperate with others. The owners of agrotourism farms who were studied undertake various forms of self-organisation. One of them is membership in rural tourism and agrotourism associations. Of the researched farms, more than

Table 2. The influence of the local self-government on the development of agrotourism services in the communes studied

The impact of local self-government on the development of agrotourism	Number of responses	% of the no. of communes
Promotion	27	47.4
Including: Participation in fairs	10	
Internet advertising	4	
Publication of leaflets	4	
Distribution of informational materials	1	
Trips to agrotourism farms	1	
Development of tourist and recreation infrastructure	11	19.3
Building technical infrastructure	7	12.3
Organisation of training courses	4	7.0
Funding agrotourism	2	3.5
Organisation of various events	2	3.5
Funding outdoor events	1	1.7
Promotion of cultural heritage	1	1.7
Record of agrotourist farmsteads	1	1.7
Maintaining the cleanliness of the natural environment	1	1.7
Total	57	100.0

Source: Own study, based on own research

**Drawing 1. The impact of agrotourism services on the development of the commune, in the opinion of the surveyed Commune Office employees**

Source: Own study, based on own research

half (50.4%) are members of some kind of association. Membership in such organisations provides an opportunity for better and less expensive promotion. Moreover, associations cooperate with

local authorities and agricultural consultancy centres.

Many of the owners of the studied agrotourism farms (76.4%), regardless of affiliation with associations, cooperate with one another. Primarily, this

cooperation consists in sending tourists to particular farms (62% of the cooperating accommodation providers), exchange of experience (37.6%), and joint promotion (28.3%). Cooperation among farmers who do agrotourism business contributes to satisfying the demand for agrotourism. Farms with no free beds at a given moment recommend other accommodation places, often located in the same commune, to tourists. Almost 1/3 of hosts support other farmers in promotional activities. This results from personal involvement in the joint promotion, sometimes even without the support of an institutional environment or without membership in any association.

In the communes studied, questions were asked about the fields of social and economic life on which agrotourism has the most powerful impact. The majority of responses were related to an increase in the incomes of the population: this factor was mentioned in 45 communes. The improvement of the aesthetics of farms was indicated in approx. 63% of communes, whilst the promotion of communes was mentioned by almost 58% of the representatives of territorial self-governments. Moreover, 44% of

respondents pointed to the increase in entrepreneurship and activity, whilst close to 37% to reduction of unemployment.

In the opinion of the employees of the Commune Offices who were asked about the negative consequences of the development of agrotourism, the major ones will be related directly or indirectly to the protection of the natural environment. These are pollution and the degradation of the natural environment (21 answers). On the other hand, 18 respondents claimed that there are no such negative consequences.

During the poll, respondents were also asked what they see as the greatest hindrance to the development of agrotourist services in a given commune. As the most troublesome barrier to the development of these services, the respondents indicated the limited financial resources of farms – in almost 72% of cases. On the other hand, problems related to the technical or tourist infrastructure, an unprepared accommodation base or low attractiveness of the area were treated quite marginally (table 2).

Table 2. The most troublesome barrier to the development of agrotourism in the commune

The most troublesome barrier to the development of agrotourism in the commune	Number of responses	%
Limited financial resources of farms	41	71.9
Unprepared accommodation base	3	5.3
No demand for this type of service	3	5.3
Low attractiveness of the locality	2	3.5
Poor technical infrastructure	2	3.5
Poor tourist infrastructure	2	3.5
No people wishing to rent lodging	2	3.5
Other ^x	2	3.5
Total	57	100.0

^xIn "Other", the respondents pointed to the fact that "Agrotourism will not be in line with the commune's existing vision" and "no cooperation between the farms"

Source: Own study, based on own research

One of the assumptions of sustainable development is increasing the quality of life of the local community. "Tourism should harmonize social life and be the reason for inhabitants' satisfaction." Wanagos and Studzienicki [2000] indicate safety, infrastructure, a clean environment, and maintaining the value of the local culture as the elements which are the

common interest of tourists and the local community.

In the opinion of the surveyed Commune Office employees, commune authorities are responsible for providing all the elements contributing to a certain quality of life, to the extent permitted by the provisions of law and the financial resources of the communes.

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