



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Sabine Baum¹, Andreas Gramzow²

¹ Institut für Agrarentwicklung in Mittel- und Osteuropa (IAMO)
Theodor-Lieser-Str. 2, 06120 Halle (Saale), Germany
baum@iamo.de

² GFA Consulting Group GmbH
Eulenkugstr. 82, 22359 Hamburg, Germany
andreas.gramzow@gfa-group.de

Rural tourism: an opportunity for the development of rural areas in Poland?

Abstract: Rural tourism – and particularly agrotourism, which has a high share in rural tourist offers – is an intensely discussed and politically supported issue in Poland. This paper critically examines the role of tourism in the development of rural areas. A literature review reveals seven success factors, whose existence or development is the precondition to develop rural tourism effectively in a region: 1) natural and cultural resources, 2) tourist and general infrastructure and services, 3) professional marketing, 4) cooperation, participation and efficient organisation, 5) human resources, 6) financial resources and technical assistance, 7) conditions of demand. The analysis of these success factors in rural regions of Poland using secondary data and literature shows both opportunities and barriers to a rural tourism development. Major opportunities are the existing natural resources in many areas and the good general outlook for the Polish tourism. In contrast, the deficiency of the tourist and general infrastructure in many rural areas, the weak marketing, the negative international image of Poland, the insufficient coordination and cooperation in tourism, the shortage of skilled labour and entrepreneurial skills, and the poor financial resources of public authorities and private enterprises hamper the development of rural tourism in Poland. Two cases studies carried out in the summer of 2005 – in the rural communes Baltów in Southeast Poland and Dębrzno in Northwest Poland – emphasize the significance of people's own initiative and partnerships in developing tourism and overcoming bottlenecks. Finally, even though rural tourism is not a panacea for the structural problems of rural areas in Poland, it could be developed in far more areas in different dimensions and forms depending on the resources provided that the regions succeed in addressing the barriers.

Keywords: rural tourism, rural development, Poland, LEADER, local partnerships

Introduction

For a long time, in most rural areas of the world agriculture was the key sector of economy and employment. However, since mid 20th century, the number of employed persons in agriculture was reduced drastically and is still falling in Western Europe; in Central and Eastern Europe this process was more slowly and in most countries agricultural employment slumped with the beginning of transition in the early 1990s. The creation of non-farm employment is therefore generally recognized to be essential to promote sustainable rural communities and to prevent poverty, out-migration and excessive aging of the rural population. This holds particularly for Central and Eastern Europe, where the diversification of rural areas is generally lower than in Western Europe, since industry and services have been hardly decentralised to rural communities in socialist times. Additionally, many rural commuters have lost their income through the closing of industrial enterprises in urban centres during transition. At the same time, the diversification of rural areas is hindered by lacking agglomeration advantages, particularly in peripheral regions. One potential new income source, often cited as an opportunity for rural areas, is rural tourism. Since the beginning of transition, nearly all Central and Eastern Europe countries have pinned their hopes for the development of rural areas on tourism. This paper will critically examine the role tourism can play in the development of rural areas in Poland. Starting with the clarification of definitions, the current significance and structure of rural tourism and agrotourism in Europe and Poland will be outlined. Then the paper will derive seven success factors of the effective development of tourism in a region from literature and analyse them with respect of rural tourism in Poland. This analysis will be supplemented by two Polish case studies carried out in the summer of 2005. The paper concludes with an assessment of the barriers and chances of tourism development in rural regions of Poland.

Definition of rural tourism and agrotourism

The concept of rural tourism has no commonly used definition. It can vary from “all tourist activities in rural areas” to specialised offers in rural areas as “holidays on a farm“. Some definitions point out the rural character of rural tourism, i.e. contact to nature, experience of heritage and participation in rural traditions – offered by small, local enterprises (see e.g. Lane 1994, WTO 2004). Lane (1994) argues that defining rural tourism is difficult since rural areas themselves are difficult to define and undergo a complex process of change, since urban forms of tourism – as theme parks or holiday villages – are also located in rural areas and since rural tourism is a complex multi-faceted activity. This article uses a functional, rather wide definition without referring to rural culture, which is hard to delimit: Rural tourism comprises all tourist activities in rural areas including all forms of tourism and accommodation categories (hotels, guesthouses, private rooms, campgrounds, farms) with the exception of tourism in major towns, resorts, spas and secondary residences. Tourist stays on agricultural holdings are referred to as agrotourism and are a segment of rural tourism.

Rural tourism in Europe

The development of tourism in rural areas started in Europe in the 18th and 19th century particularly at the seaside and in high mountains, i.e. in areas with a unique selling proposition. These areas became soon specialised tourist destinations (Steinecke 2006) and are nowadays not numbered among rural tourism. Tourism is still largely concentrated into these specialist beach, lake and mountain resort areas, and into major cultural centres (Lane 1994). The “rest” of the countryside became attractive for tourists in the course of industrialisation and urbanisation (Steinecke 2006) and the broader development of environmental politics and protection since the late 1970s. In the second half of the 20th century many rural areas in Europe received political aid to develop tourism as an alternative to the shrinking agricultural sector. Recently, also at the EU level rural tourism is again supported as effective catalyst for rural development (Sharpley and Vass 2006) to facilitate the diversification of rural economy and to create income and new jobs. However, job, income and multiplier effects of tourism are difficult to assess. Some studies about rural tourism observe only minor success in job creation. In addition, the share of seasonal and low-paid work in tourism is generally high (Ribeiro and Marques 2002, Steinecke 2006). Agrotourism prevents the farm family to migrate away – by using idle labour of the farm household – rather than creating new jobs for non-family labour (e.g. Hjalager 1996). The income generated by rural tourism is in small enterprises mostly only a supplement to the household income (Hjalager 1996, Oppermann 1996, Sharpley and Vass 2006). Further benefits of rural tourism can encompass improving quality of life through upgraded infrastructure, revaluing rural traditions, raising public awareness of environmental and heritage concerns and becoming acquainted with new people and “urban” ideas (Oppermann 1996, Steinecke 2006, WTO 2004). However, there can also be negative impacts as landscape damages or social tensions, particularly with regional large-scale tourism (Steinecke 2006).

Dimensions and growth of rural tourism are hard to quantify, since a clear definition and statistics are lacking (Lane 1994). Agrotourism is easier to distinguish and received great attention from academics and agriculture ministries. Its role is therefore frequently overestimated (Lane 1994, Oppermann 1996). Agrotourism is mostly not included in official statistics, since it is accounted for in the majority of cases among private accommodation. However, it is recorded in the EU Farm Structure Survey (FSS), whose numbers for 2005 are cited below. Farm holidays have a high significance and long tradition in many parts of German-speaking countries. In Austria for example, 8% of all agricultural holdings offer farm holidays (FSS) providing the seventh part of all tourist beds (Embacher 2003). In Germany, 4% of all agricultural holdings have tourist activities (FSS), which are developed mainly in the Western part and present only a small segment in the total tourism of Germany (Steinecke 2006). In Great Britain and France, the development of agrotourism started later, but has undergone a significant growth in the last 20 years (Long and Lane 2000, Sharpley and Vass 2006). In Great Britain, 11% of all agricultural

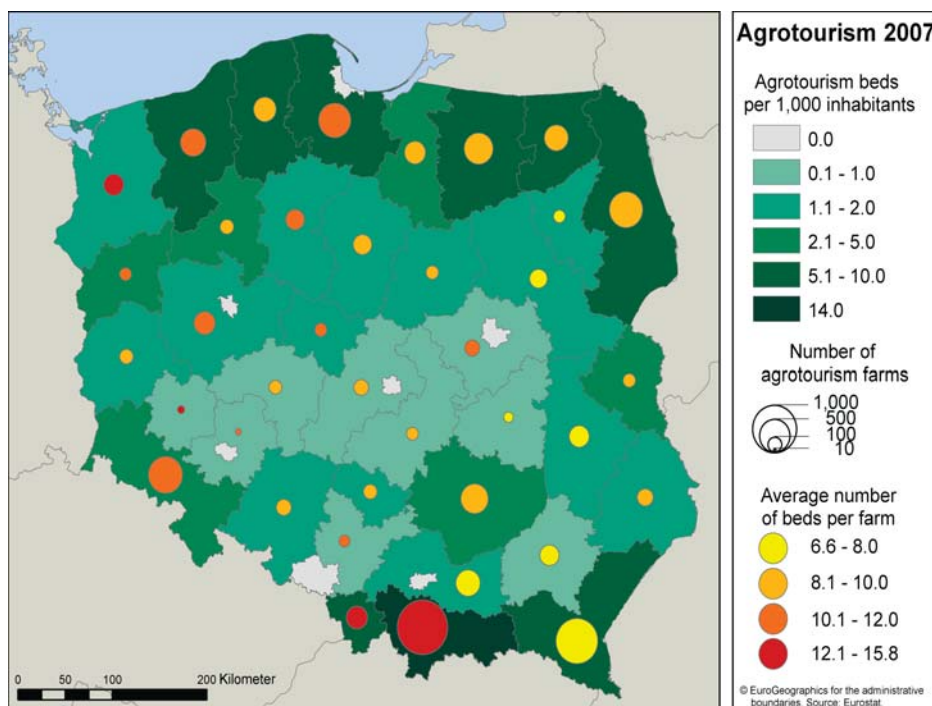
holdings offer farm holidays, in France these are 3% (FSS). In Southern Europe, agrotourism is still in its infancy with shares below 0.5%. Only Italy reaches a share of 0.7% of agrotourism farms in all agricultural holdings (FSS). In Central and Eastern Europe, agrotourism has not been noteworthy until 1990, when it started to develop in many countries. However, the shares of agrotourism in all farms are still below 1%. For example, in Slovenia, whose tradition in agrotourism goes back to the 19th century, 0.8% of all farms are engaged in tourism (FSS), which accounted in 2002 for 0.4% of all arrivals and overnight stays in Slovenia and had the lowest occupancy rates (Bojnec 2004). In Poland, 0.4% of all agricultural holdings offer tourism as other gainful activity (FSS).

Rural tourism in Poland

In Poland, rural tourism existed already in the 19th century, but its development was not significant until 1990. In the 1990s, the initial tourism development in rural areas was often manifested in small-scale agrotourism enterprises as a result of off-farm diversification aimed at getting additional income and to use new opportunities (Hegarty and Przezborska 2005). In 2007, agrotourism accounted approximately for 10% of all tourist beds in Poland.⁴ Figures of the agricultural advisory centres⁵ state an increase of agrotourism enterprises from 590 in 1990, and 4,800 in 1997 to 8,244 in 2004 (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2005). Together with other private accommodation in rural areas the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development estimated the total number of rural tourism enterprises in 2002 as 13,154 units with 137,164 beds and 960,132 guests, equivalent to 6.7% of total national overnight stays (Hegarty and Przezborska 2005). In 2007, there existed 8,790 agrotourism enterprises according to a survey of the Institute of Tourism (2007). They are more evenly distributed as hotels, but still concentrated on the traditional tourist destinations in the Carpathian and Sudeten Mountains, at the Baltic Sea and in the Lakelands of Northern Poland (s. Map 1). The dynamic growth of agrotourism slowed down in recent years (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2005) and possibilities for further quantitative growth seem to be limited. The main focus is now on raising the standard and specialisation, which is for example in comparison with Ireland rather low (Kozak 2006, Hegarty and Przezborska 2005, Sikorska-Wolak 2006). However, there exists a legal barrier, since all new activities have to be limited to the previous premises to have a continuing tax relief (Kozak 2006).

4 Figures for agrotourism and private rooms based on Institute of Tourism 2007. Figures for collective tourist accommodation establishments based on Central Statistical Office Poland.

5 There exist no exact, consistent data for agrotourism enterprises, which are mostly private accommodation. Agrotourism enterprises with not more than five rooms to accommodate guests are exempted from tax and not obliged to register. And only a small fraction of agrotourism enterprises is organised in the Polish Federation of Country Tourism „Hospitable Farms“.



Map 1. Distribution of agrotourism farms and beds in Poland 2007

Source: Author's calculation based on Institut of Tourism 2007 (agrotourism) and CSO (inhabitants)

Since 1990, agrotourism has been paid heightened political attention. It has been regarded as an opportunity for creating new non-agricultural business and jobs in rural areas and has been supported with tax relief (Kozak 2006). Different consulting projects with experts from EU countries (e.g. TOURIN I and II 1992-97) conducted analyses and pilot schemes and identified rural tourism and agrotourism as an important economic factor and as one out of five potential future unique Polish tourism products. Agricultural advisory centres were set up, which supported farmers in starting and marketing of tourist offers through training and consulting. In 1996, the Polish Federation of Country Tourism „Hospitable Farms“ (Polskia Federacja Turystyki Wiejskiej „Gospodarstwa Gościnne“) was founded, which encompasses today 40 local and regional associations. In the following years, rural tourism received a high significance in official documents (Augustyn 1998), however, not necessarily resulting in real support and developments. Measures as credit grants, the EU pre-accession-aid SAPARD and the SOP “Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development” should support agrotourism farms (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2005); however, they have been used only by a minority of enterprises (Firlej and Niedziółka 2007).

So far no evaluation of the development of agrotourism has been done. Even a rough assessment is hindered by the fact, that there are no exact, comprehensive data about the structure, income, jobs, qualifications and guests of agrotourism farms (Kozak 2006). The achievable income is already limited by the size of enterprises – on average 10 beds per farm – and a price level below that of other collective accommodation (Bott-Alama 2004). A survey in Wielkopolskie revealed that the share of tourism in total household income is 10% or less in one half of agrotourism farms. Only 17% of farms referred to tourism as main income source (Przezbórska 2003), in contrast to Ireland, where this were 39%. A stronger focus on tourism could support the specialisation and market orientation of enterprises and foster cooperation, but is rejected by the majority of Polish agrotourism farms (Hegarty and Przezbórska 2005). In spite of small revenues agrotourism seems to be profitable for many suppliers. In Masuria, more than 90% of the interviewed enterprises characterised agrotourism as profitable, in Western Pomerania 43% (Bott-Alama 2004). New jobs for non-family labour have been normally not created by agrotourism (Golemsbki and Majewski 2003). However, given the high hidden unemployment in Poland the improved utilisation of household labour is also an important contribution. The share of rural households, which benefit directly from agrotourism, is with less than 1% rather small, but can be significantly higher in certain areas (e.g. in the Carpathians). Furthermore, agrotourism has effects for the communes as a whole, such as the improvement of aesthetics, use of existing housing resources, additional income for all inhabitants and the communal budget, reduction of unemployment, encouragement to acquire new skills and knowledge, personality development through contact with tourists, and increased care for the heritage (Bott-Alama 2004). Bott-Alama (2004, p.109) underlines that “the most important benefit of rural tourism development is stimulating entrepreneurship, the lack of which is regarded as the most important barrier to rural areas development in Poland.”

Determinants for a successful tourism development

To be able to assess the potential of rural tourism in Poland it is important to examine the relevant determinants of tourism development. A comprehensive literature review (see e.g. Fuchs 2007, Gannon 1994, Haart and Steinecke 1995, Long and Lane 2000, Long and Nuckolls 1994, Porter 1994, Raich 2006, Steinecke 2006, Wilson et al. 2001) revealed seven success factors of the effective development of tourism in a region: six supply factors on the one hand and the conditions of demand on the other hand (Figure 1).

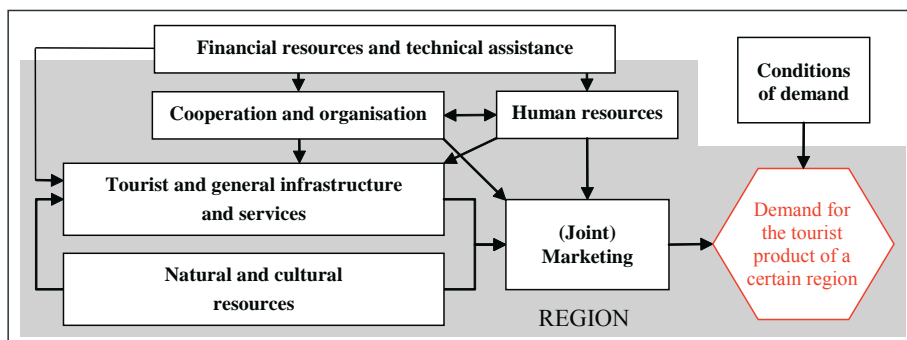


Figure 1. Determinants for a successful tourism development in a region

Source: Author's own work

The natural and cultural resources include the attractiveness of villages and landscapes, the distance to urban markets, climate, cultural heritage, and traditions of a region, and they are the most important precondition for the suitability of a region as tourist destination. Additionally, adequate tourist and general infrastructure and services are necessary, which comprise accommodation, restaurants, and recreational facilities (including indoor offers), transport connections, hospitality, and atmosphere of the holiday area. In order that a region gains a positive image as a holiday area and tourists accept the offer, a professional marketing is necessary. It should be done jointly within one region, since small rural providers often lack the resources and skills, and tourists ask not for individual offers but for the whole tourist product of a destination, whose borders mostly do not fit in administrative boundaries. This fact together with the fragmented structure of rural suppliers and the interconnections of tourism with other economic sectors point out the crucial role of cooperation, participation and efficient organisation as success strategy in tourism. Individual actors or communes do not have sufficient resources to become firmly established in tourist markets. Strategic-conceptual tasks as networking offers can only be done together, while other tasks as marketing are much more efficient when organised in a cooperative way. The willingness to cooperate and to take entrepreneurial risks, people's own initiative, knowledge resources, and the number and qualification of labour form together the human resources of a region and are another decisive factor of tourism development. Finally, the development of tourism requires sufficient financial resources – equity capital, credits, and capital of public authorities. Since these are often insufficient in rural areas, exogenous investment aids and consulting are the last relevant supply factor. On the other side, the conditions of demand – its structure, dimension and growth paths – are one of the most important determinants of the competitive advantage of tourism destinations. In times of globalised tourism markets it is extremely important for success to adjust supply according to demand and to identify trends and target groups. It has to be carefully weighted up for each region under which conditions, in which dimension and in which form tourism can be developed. The precondition for a successful development of rural tourism is the existence or the possibility to develop the above seven success factors. They will be analysed in the following for rural tourism in Poland.

The **natural and cultural resources** in Poland are characterised by varied landscapes, large areas with low population density and many cultural sites and are therefore in principle suitable for rural tourism. However, the season is mainly focused on summer, which features rather unfavourable, unsettled weather. The traditional tourist destinations with high scenic attractiveness are the Baltic Sea coast, the lake lands in Northern Poland, the highlands of Central Poland, and the Sudeten and Carpathian Mountains. A problem of many other rural areas in Poland is the lacking unique selling proposition of the landscape. However, Haart and Steinecke (1995) assume that this shortage can be compensated by a combination of supply segments to a unique complete package. In fact, the objective measure of scenic attractiveness for a whole country is connected with many methodological problems, although very often tried in Poland. Therefore, an individual analysis of scenic and cultural attractiveness and the accessibility for urban markets is proposed for each region interested in tourism. Particular potential certainly have those areas, which offer already tourism due to their attractiveness, and the wider surrounding area of big cities with forests and lakes for short breaks (Bański 2003). However, also in other areas there can be “hidden” attractions revealable by analysis.

The deficient **tourist and general infrastructure** are one of the major barriers to rural tourism in Poland – similar to other Central and Eastern European countries (Jordan 2006, Paesler 2007). Road network, technical infrastructure, accommodation, catering and leisure facilities suffer from decades of neglect and despite recent improvements still need considerable investments (Golebski and Majewski 2003, Wyrzykowski 2000). Hotels in Poland are concentrated in big cities and some attractive destinations and have a high share of beds with low standard (Kozak 2006, Paesler 2007). Low standard and specialisation is also often characteristic of newly set-up agrotourism farms. A noticeable upgrade of tourist infrastructure at the international level is laborious, time-consuming and costly, and thus according to Jordan (2006), only possible gradually in certain suitable places as Masuria. In less attractive regions this can work only in combination with a general economic development (Bański 2003). In addition to investments in physical infrastructure, the evolution of a new service and business culture is important in all formerly socialist countries. Many enterprises in tourism pursue mainly short-term financial goals and pay too little attention to service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Augustyn and Thomas 2007).

The **marketing** of rural tourist offers, the awareness of its significance and the perception of market segmentation show obvious shortcomings in Poland (e.g. Golebski and Majewski 2003, Wyrzykowski 2000). The rapid development of agrotourism occurred mainly in a product-oriented way expecting the demand would arise automatically (Hegarty and Przezborska 2005). Thus, the future strengthening of marketing and market research is crucial for the success of rural tourism. To attract also foreign tourists the sustainable change

of the negative image of “Eastern Europe” – including Poland – is decisive. Central and Eastern Europe is still reputed to be criminal, uncertain, poor, badly equipped, monotonous, and cheap (e.g. Bodmer et al. 2003, Wyrzykowski 2000). This is fostered by the insufficient knowledge of potential tourists about the Central and Eastern European countries, so that the bad image is working even after several improvements. Poland has to work against this negative mental map of tourists with a comprehensive marketing at the national and regional levels, with statistics about the real situation e.g. concerning safety, or travel reports about „insider tips” in daily and weekly press (Bodmer et al. 2003).

The development of rural tourism in Poland suffers from fragmented responsibilities and from insufficient coordination and **cooperation** between farmers, tourism enterprises, local and regional authorities (e.g. Augustyn and Thomas 2007, Golembowski and Majewski 2003). Experiences in applying participatory procedures are limited, the willingness to cooperate and the consciousness of long-term strategies and aspects of sustainability are rather low (Augustyn and Thomas 2007, Gramzow 2006a and 2006b, Roberts and Simpson 1999). Tourism is first the responsibility of local self-government (Majewska 2008), what entails the danger of narrow, „parochial thinking“. Only 8% of all agrotourism farms and only a part of all local and regional organisations are estimated to be a member in the Polish Federation of Country Tourism, which is important for marketing, training, and support in the application for EU funds. Many agrotourism farms cooperate informally, e.g. through sending of tourists, exchange of experiences and joint marketing (Firlej and Niedziółka 2007). Important stimulating effects had the EU initiative LEADER+, which was introduced in Poland as pilot scheme in 2004. It received great interest, so that between 2004 and 2006 in the first round 174 and in the second round 150 local action groups could be financed (FDPA 2008).

The **human resources** in many rural areas of Poland are in a rather unfavourable condition due to an overaged population, out-migration, social frustration through high unemployment and low education levels. For that reason, Bański (2003) makes a sceptical assessment of the chances for a rural tourism development. Education, labour market and partly the migration balance in rural areas have recently improved (FDPA 2008). However, people’s own initiative, entrepreneurial spirit and hospitality are still not very pronounced, and many rural tourism enterprises lack important entrepreneurial and tourism skills (Augustyn 1998, Kozak 2006). Thus, Golembowski and Majewski (2003) refer to this situation as „civilisation barrier“ to agrotourism in Poland. City dwellers, who have moved to rural areas, play an important role as proactive pioneers (Golembowski and Majewski 2003, Kozak 2006). A major part of agrotourism providers seems to have at least a secondary education, foreign language competence and rather young manager, and half of them have attended advanced training courses (e.g. Firlej and Niedziółka 2007, Grykien 1999, Hegarty and Przezborska 2005).

In Poland, poor **financial resources** of public authorities and private enterprises are a serious problem for the development of rural tourism (e.g. Augustyn 1998, Wyrzykowski 2000) so that external funding is considered as indispensable (Golembki and Majewski 2003). Small agricultural holdings interested in starting tourism often have no financial means. In spite of state programmes, the access to credits is restricted for small enterprises so that not many agrotourism enterprises have made use of loans so far (Firlej and Niedziółka 2007, Golembki and Majewski 2003). Hopes are connected with EU funds (Golembki and Majewski 2003). However, until now, their allocation was heavily dependent on local possibilities of co-financing (Bański 2003) and so they have been used only by few agrotourism farms (Firlej and Niedziółka 2007). As specified in the Polish Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013, rural tourism can potentially use 14% of all EU rural development funds in Poland. These are the measures "Rural renewal and development" (589.6 Mio. Euro) and "Establishment and development of micro-enterprises" (1.023.6 Mio. Euro) of axis 3, and the LEADER axis 4 (787.5 Mio. Euro). In addition, **technical assistance** in the form of external consulting is recommended given the present structure of rural human resources.

Conditions of demand in Poland

In the 1990s, the development of agrotourism was very product-oriented and fast-paced so that the demand could not keep up with the supply (Hegarty and Przezborska 2005). In future, rural tourism offers have to be based upon the preferences of tourists. However, there is little known about the structure or trends of demand for rural tourism in Poland, since there are no comprehensive studies and data. The share of rural and particularly agrotourism in total Polish tourism seems to be limited up to now. According to figures of the Institute of Tourism (2006), the share of agrotourism accommodation in all domestic long trips above 5 days was in 2006 only 4%. The spatial distribution of tourism demand is strongly concentrated on traditional destinations. Examining the overnight stays in collective accommodation establishments in 2006 in the 45 NUTS-3 regions (CSO) shows that nearly three quarters of all stays are in the main cities (23%), the Baltic coast (26%), and the Sudeten and Carpathian Mountains (together 22%). The guests of agrotourism farms in Poland are mainly city families with rather high qualification, which repeatedly spend their holiday on farms chosen after word-of-mouth recommendation (Kozak 2006, Przezborska 2005, Zarêbski 2006). While Przezborska (2005) could not observe foreign guests of agrotourism farms in Wielkopolskie, some studies in the Carpathians (Firlej and Niedziółka 2007) and Sudeten Mountains (e.g. Grykien 1999) mention shares of foreign guests, however, without quantifying them. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2005) describes a particular interest of foreign guests in the 214 ecotourism farms. The motives for farm holidays are mainly rest and recreation, low prices, contact with nature, country life, healthy food, and picturesque landscape (e.g. Sikorska 2007, Zarêbski 2006).

The demand for agrotourism features an increasing tendency over the past years according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2005). Some factors could positively work on the demand for rural tourism in future. First, demand for rural tourism can not be examined uncoupled from the general trend in Polish tourism. Through the recently decreasing unemployment rate and growing incomes, the rising educational level, and the increasing car ownership (CSO) more Poles than before are interested and have the possibility to participate in holidays. After several drops the domestic demand is increasing since 2004 (Eurostat), and the Institute of Tourism (2008) forecasts an increase of trips of Poles from 45.8 million in 2006 to 56.6 million in 2013. These trends can have positive impacts also on rural tourism. The EU accession and the expansion of air connections raised the demand for holidays in Poland from EU15 countries, which accounted for three quarters of all nights spent by non-residents in 2007 (Eurostat). The total inbound tourism is steadily increasing since 1999 (Eurostat), and the Institute of Tourism (2008) forecasts an increase of arrivals of foreign guests in collective accommodation establishments from 4.3 million in 2006 to 6 million in 2013. However, domestic demand will stay in the near future most important for Polish destinations. The share of non-residential overnight stays was in 2006 only 21% (EU27 42%, Eurostat) and strongly concentrated on the main cities as Warsaw or Krakow (CSO).

Second, rural tourism in Poland can benefit from rising environmental consciousness. While in Western Europe the high and rising ecological awareness results in increasing demand for ecotourism and rural tourism (e.g. ETC 2006, Pils 2006, WTO 2004), the demand for these segments among Polish tourists is still rather low (Nowaczek and Fennell 2002, Przezbórska 2003). However, the environmental awareness in Poland is gradually rising particularly among the young, and Przezbórska (2003) assumes that the Poles soon will follow Western tourism trends. In addition, Somorowska (2003) states activity tourism as new trend in Poland. Paesler (1999) sees a potential of nature-oriented tourism in Poland e.g. for German tourists, which have a high participation in tourist trips, a high share of trips abroad, and a high environmental sensibility, and which are the most important foreign source market for Poland with a share of 39% of all nights spent by non-residents in Poland in 2007 (Eurostat).

Third, the general trend to several shorter trips instead of one long trip yearly (ETC 2006, Pils 2006, Steinecke 2006) can favour rural tourism, which is for many people not attractive enough as main holiday but as secondary or short trip. Somorowska (2003) states an increasing trend of weekend trips in Poland, whereas the Institute of Tourism (2008) predicts only a slight rise of short trips and a stronger increase of long trips. Fourth, the general trend of tourism demand to be more flexible, segmented and individualised (ETC 2006, Kozak 2006, Pils 2006, Steinecke 2006) can foster niche markets and thus also rural tourism. However, rural tourism itself needs to develop not standard but individual offers for certain target groups. Some farms could also try to follow the recent trend of wellness and health offers, which also will be

stimulated by the aging population in Europe (ETC 2006, Pils 2006). Finally, the domestic demand potential for rural tourism in Poland is so far restricted by the high share of population still living in rural areas and the pronounced family ties of city dwellers to the countryside. However, this could change in future (Kozak 2006). All in all, information and data about segmentation, preferences and trends of Polish tourism fall far short, and there is an urgent need for market research to be successful in rural tourism.

Local initiatives for the development of rural tourism in Poland: two case studies

In the following, two examples of local initiatives in rural communes aimed at developing tourism are described. Each case study is based on 35 guideline interviews conducted in the summer of 2005 with local government officials, members of local development associations, local entrepreneurs, farmers (including agrotourism farms) and other rural inhabitants. The first case study refers to the Bałtów commune, located in Southeastern Poland (district Ostrowiecki, voivodship Swietokrzyskie). The second case study is in the Dębrzno commune, which belongs to the district Człuchowski (voivodship Pomorskie) in the Northwest.⁶

Bałtów in Southeast Poland

The rural commune Bałtów has about 4,000 inhabitants and a population density of 39 inhabitants / km². Its local economy is strongly related to agriculture, which is characterized by very small farms with an average size of 5.3 ha in 2004 (CSO). The poor equipment of farms, the fragmented land structure and the lacking structural change in agriculture are serious problems of the region. The closure of a steel company in the next bigger city Ostrowiec in the early 1990s led to a high open and hidden unemployment and social frustration. The official unemployment rate of the Ostrowiecki district was 29% in 2004 (CSO). Until 2002, the local government showed no interest in local economic development and hampered local initiatives. The preconditions for a tourist development were mixed. The commune Bałtów has no tourist background at all. The tourism intensity in the Ostrowiecki district is very low reaching only 0.3 overnight stays per inhabitant in 2006 (Poland 1.3, EU27 4.7, CSO and Eurostat). Bałtów is located in a valley within a hilly, woody surrounding, which can be quite attractive for tourists and is suitable for hiking. The tourist accommodations are low-standard and based on agrotourism farms. There are no tourist and entrepreneurial skills since most people in Bałtów worked previously either in agriculture or in the steel company. A factor, that particularly hampered a tourist development in the early 1990s, was the lack of cooperation between inhabitants due to a lack of trust. Overcoming this lack was one of the most important prerequisites for the successful development in Bałtów.

6 More detailed descriptions of the case studies can be found in Gramzow (2006a, 2006b).

In 2001, the local association Bałt was founded by few local people. Bałt was aimed at reducing unemployment, conservation and clean up of natural resources, and the development of tourism. The first tourist facilities provided were canoeing treks on the local river. The Environmental Partnership foundation from Krakow supported Bałt with initial funding and advice. In 2003, scientists found dinosaurs' footprints on a rock close to Bałtów so that the idea of a dinosaur' park arose. Together with another local NGO – the association Delta of Ostrowiec – the dinosaurs' park was set up and opened its doors in 2004. It contained natural monuments and about 30 dinosaurs' models on three hectares. The costs of constructing the park were mostly covered from EU funds and bank credits, whereas a local entrepreneur acted as guarantor. In June 2003, the associations Bałt and Delta, local NGOs of other communes, representatives from the regional and local governments, and local businesses founded the rural partnership Flintstone circle (Krzemienny Krąg) in order to coordinate the tourism development activities in the region and to encourage regional entrepreneurship. The new rural partnership comprised 49 partners from nine communes belonging to nine districts and two voivodships (Świętokrzyskie and Mazowieckie). The name of the partnership referred to Stone Age settlements and a subterranean flint stone quarry discovered in the region and constituting now famous tourism attractions. The Flintstone circle received funding by the LEADER+ pilot scheme I and II (2004-2006). Its activities range from the organisation of different cultural events in the region and the opening of a museum about the writer Witold Gombrowicz, who grew up in a village close to Ostrowiec, to the elaboration of a regional tourism strategy. This strategy also envisages creating different natural hiking and bike tracks, which connect tourist attractions with each other.

The activities of the associations and partnerships resulted in the increasing number of tourists in the region. Bałtów is located 160 km south of Warsaw and attracts in particular young families from the capital for weekend or short trips. The number of overnight stays in the Ostrowiecki district grew from 21,043 in 2003 to 45,516 in 2007 (CSO). The dinosaurs' park alone attracted 156,000 tourists in 2004 and 2005 and created 60 new jobs. The unemployment rate in the Ostrowiecki district dropped from 29% in 2004 to 19% in 2007 (CSO). New non-agricultural jobs were created and different small shops and tourist accommodations emerged. Furthermore, the local partnerships increased the frequency of interaction among inhabitants, thus leading among others to an improvement of local trust. Inhabitants became more open minded and started to identify themselves with their region. The elaboration of a local development strategy enabled local businesses and inhabitants, who planned to start a business, to bring in their ideas and to coordinate their investments. Workshops and seminars organised by the local partnership helped local agrotourism farms and shop owners to adjust their offers and encouraged other villagers to take part in the tourist development. All in all, the local associations managed to use the existing natural and cultural resources quite successful by creative ideas, local leadership and cooperation, a coordinated expansion of tourist infrastructure and unique offers, open meetings and semi-

nars to increase acceptance and human capital, and the acquisition of credits and EU funding. However, getting capital from EU or national funds remains problematic, in addition to the still insufficient human capital due to the lacking tourism tradition.

Dębrzno in Northwest Poland

The rural commune Dębrzno has 9,300 inhabitants, of which 57% lives in the small town Dębrzno. The population density is 42 inhabitants / km² (CSO). In the rural area surrounding the town, agriculture plays an important role. In contrast to Bałtów, farms in Dębrzno emerged generally from former state-owned farms and are both larger (average 16.5 ha in 2004) and better-equipped. The restructuring of the state-owned farms in the early 1990s led to the dismissal of many agricultural workers and thus to a high unemployment reaching 34% in 2004 in the Czulchowski district (CSO). Most unemployed people lack professional and entrepreneurial skills, are long-term unemployed, often of older age and relatively passive. Seminars and workshops organized by the regional labour agencies mostly did not match the local needs since many unemployed people are not able to effect a drastic change in their profession due to their age. Furthermore, no employment opportunities were available in the region regardless whether people attended advanced vocational trainings or not. The town Dębrzno was a famous tourism destination before the Second World War. It was endowed with cultural facilities and high-standard accommodations, all of which suffered during socialism – in particular after the construction of a military base in the 1970s – and are currently not in a good condition. The recent tourism development in Dębrzno mainly focuses on the natural resources of the countryside. There are a lot of lakes and forests within low-populated rural areas which can be attractive for nature-oriented vacations. The rural tourist accommodations are based on agro-tourism farms. The regional human resources as well as the lack of trust and cooperation were rather unfavourable for a tourism development.

In 2000, the Partnership of the Northern Necklace (Naszyjnik Północy) was founded by local government officials, NGOs and businesses of 32 communes belonging to 12 different districts and four voivodships. The Partnership was coordinated by the Association for the development of the city and the commune of Dębrzno and its aim was mainly to foster a sustainable development of the region and to create (nature-oriented) tourist facilities. The first steps of the partnership were funded by the Environmental Partnership Foundation from Krakow and the Batory Foundation from Warsaw. The main project was the 870 km long bike trail „Green way of the Northern Necklace“, that goes through different national and landscape parks. The partnership established also a local brand called “Northern Necklace”, which can be given to local (handicraft) products, services, commune initiatives, and agro-tourism farms, if they follow certain defined standards. A logo and a catalogue for local handicraft products were elaborated as well, and the partnership promoted the brand on regional, national and international fairs. The certified products are sold in

different shops along the bike trail. In addition, given the problematic state of human capital in Dębrzno the partnership organized different workshops and seminars. In trainings especially for low-skilled and long-term unemployed people attendants were taught among other things how to produce handicraft products such as bouquets of flowers, herbs, ceramic products and glass paintings, which were later sold by means of the local brand. They also received basic marketing and entrepreneurial skills and were encouraged to open small shops or to provide tourist accommodations. Thus, the partnership could also reach low-skilled inhabitants to benefit from the tourist development. Financial sources to fund these initiatives were basically the EU pre-accession aid PHARE, the LEADER+ pilot scheme I and II, and national funds.

As a result of these activities already 35,000 tourists used the bike trail in its first year (2005) and more than 70 small shops, enterprises and accommodations emerged close to it. The green way attracts people from the whole country as well as from neighbouring countries. Bike and natural-oriented tourism is in particular favoured by Western European visitors, who already constitute an important share of the tourists travelling along the trail. The promotional activities increased the popularity of Dębrzno. The attitudes of local people changed. They became more active and open, could improve their skills and learned how to manage projects. Cooperation and trust in the region could be enhanced. The unemployment rate in the Czluchowski district decreased from 34% in 2004 to 21% in 2007. So, the partnership is another successful example of how the existing natural resources can be used for tourism and the bottlenecks of lacking tourist infrastructure and human resources can be overcome by manifold cooperative initiatives funded by EU and national funds.

Synthesis

Both regions described in the case studies had quite attractive even though not unique, natural resources, which were hardly used by tourists in the past. The basic factor for the successful development of tourism in Bałtów and Dębrzno was cooperation in local partnerships. They worked due to an advantageous organisational structure, a strong local leader, a good collaboration with local governments, and the participation of locals. In both regions, the partnerships had creative ideas to develop, coordinate and market new attractive tourist offers, and they improved the human capital through advanced training and workshops. Another important success factor was external funding and advice. In this respect, the Environmental Partnership Foundation from Krakow and the EU programme LEADER+ played an important role. Also in future, local action groups of the LEADER approach can have a stimulating impact for Poland's rural areas and encourage rural inhabitants to make use of their regional tourist potential, since LEADER fosters people's own initiative and makes it possible to finance large projects, which could not be done by single local associations or communes.

Rural tourism – and particularly agrotourism, which has a high share in the tourist offers of rural areas in Poland – is an intensely discussed and politically supported issue in Poland. Due to the upsurge in the 1990s the absolute number of agrotourism farms is high in comparison to many other European countries, even if they have only a low share in the large number of all (often small) agricultural holdings. So far, tourism has had higher economic significance mainly in traditional tourist destinations. However, due to the more equal distribution of agrotourism farms rural tourism created in many areas of Poland incentives for entrepreneurship, people's own initiative, and human development. For a small part of rural households agrotourism provides in addition a direct contribution to income, reduction of hidden unemployment and development of human capital.

Positive factors for the future potential of rural tourism in Poland are the existing natural resources, which are, however, not necessarily present everywhere and have to be analysed realistically for each region. Furthermore, the good general outlook for the Polish tourism and the rise in environmental consciousness and urbanisation in Poland can have positive impacts on tourism in rural areas. The political support is an advantage, too. The major barrier for a comprehensive tourism development is the deficiency of the tourist and general infrastructure in many rural areas. To attain here an adequate level sufficient capital is necessary, but frequently not available as a result of poor financial resources of the public authorities and private enterprises as well as credit rationing. EU funding can partly compensate this; however, co-financing is always necessary. In addition, the weak marketing, the negative international image of Poland, the insufficient cooperation in tourism, and the shortage of skilled labour and entrepreneurial skills hamper the development of tourism. Strategies for rural tourism should be aware of these bottlenecks and address them in an appropriate way.

The potential of the existing agrotourism farms should be utilised better by improving and specialising the offer. Legal barriers have to be reduced. On the national level, sound market research and work on the international image of Poland are essential. Too little is known about the dimensions, segmentation, and growth opportunities of demand for rural tourism from home and abroad. This information is crucial to direct the offers to tourist trends and customer preferences and to make them successful. The formation of new enterprises should not be any longer product-oriented. A minimum quality level could be achieved by a duty to register and to attend an adequate training course. However, it is questionable, if this could become accepted in Poland. Moreover, functioning organisations and cooperation – particularly on the regional level (between voivodship and communes) – are important for the effective development and marketing of rural tourism. However, to establish such organisations is difficult due to the missing tradition of regional policy and the resistance of population to regional planning in Poland. The EU initiative LEA-

DER+ (now axis 4 of EU rural development policy) seems to be a promising approach to foster cooperation, trust, people's own initiative and institution building as demonstrated by the case studies.

Rural tourism is not a panacea for the structural problems of rural areas. The difficulties to establish new tourist destinations in the globalised tourism markets should not be underestimated. This should be emphasized more than before in the Polish debate. Nevertheless, provided that local people are interested and active and that there are natural and/or cultural attractions, far more areas could develop tourism to a significant economic factor, if they succeed in overcoming the bottlenecks. In regions without a unique selling proposition tourism can be developed jointly with other activities on a small scale and in niche markets. Particular chances have the wider surrounding of large cities for short trips and leisure. A realistic analysis of the depicted seven success factors should be always the starting point; and the tourism strategy should be embedded in an overall concept for the rural area. The majority of regions will have to base their diversification on more pillars than tourism.

References

- Augustyn M., 1998, *National strategies for rural tourism development and sustainability: the Polish experience*, Journal of Sustainable Tourism 6, 3, 191-209.
- Augustyn M., Thomas R., 2007, *Small Firms in the New Europe: Key Issues, Conclusions and Recommendations*, In: Thomas R., Augustyn, M. (eds.), *Tourism in the new Europe: perspectives on SME policies and practices*, Amsterdam, 227-236.
- Bański J., 2003, *Transforming the functional structure of Poland's rural areas*, In: Bański J., Owsinski J. (eds.), *Alternatives for European Rural Areas*. Warschau, 19-37.
- Bodmer U., Haugg A., Sladek C., 2003, *Hemmnisse und Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten für ländlichen Tourismus in Bulgarien, Rumänien und Tschechien aus Nachfragersicht*, Tourismus Journal 7, 1, 87-106.
- Bojnec S., 2004, *Farm tourism: Myth or reality?* In: Petrick M., Weingarten P. (eds.), *The Role of Agriculture in Central and Eastern European Rural Development*, Halle, 286-304.
- Bott-Alama A., 2004, *The Economic and Social Benefits of Rural Tourism Development in Poland*, In: WTO (ed.), *Rural Tourism in Europe*, 101-109.
- CSO Central Statistical Office of Poland: www.stat.gov.pl/english/
- Embacher H., 2003, *Strategy formulation in rural tourism: An integrated approach*, In: Hall D., Roberts L., Mitchell M. (eds.), *New directions in rural tourism*. Aldershot, 137-151.
- Eurostat data: epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1996,45323734&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=welcomeref&open=/&product=EU_MAIN_TREE&depth=1
- ETC European Travel Commission, 2006, *Tourism Trends for Europe*. London.

- FDPA Foundation for the Development of Polish Agriculture, 2008. *Rural Poland*. Warsaw.
- Firlej K., Niedziółka A., 2007, *Agritourism as a factor of local development in the Malopolska region*,. In: Roczniki Naukowe, 9, 2, 92-96.
- Fuchs O., 2007, *Kooperation als strategisches Element regionaler Tourismusentwicklung*, Raumforschung und Raumordnung 65, 6, 502-513.
- Gannon A. 1994, *Rural tourism as a factor in rural community economic development for economies in transition*, Journal of Sustainable Tourism 2, 1-2, 51-60.
- Golembski G., Majewski J., 2003, *Rural Tourism: Can it reach critical mass and create jobs and income sufficient to compensate for the demise of agriculture? The case of Poland*, Presentation, 5th Tourism Summits, Chamonix Mont-Blanc, 3-5.12.2003. www.ae.poznan.pl/turystyka/tresc_nauka/zalaczniki/chamonix.htm (06/08).
- Gramzow A., 2006a, *Local partnership as an incubator for rural development: the case of Dębrzno, North-western Poland*, IAMO Discussion paper 90, Halle.
- Gramzow A., 2006b, *Endogenous Initiatives as a Chance to Improve Rural Livelihood: Results of a Case Study in Bałtów, South-eastern Poland*, IAMO Discussion paper 95, Halle.
- Grykien S., 1999, *Tourist farms in lower Silesia, Poland*, Geojournal 46, 3, 279-281.
- Haart N., Steinecke A., 1995, *Umweltschonender Tourismus – eine Entwicklungsalternative für den ländlichen Raum in Europa*, In: Moll, P. (ed.), *Umweltschonender Tourismus*, Bonn, 17-32.
- Hegarty C., Przezbórska, L., 2005, *Rural and Agri-Tourism as a Tool for Reorganising Rural Areas in Old and New Member States – Comparison Study of Ireland and Poland*, International journal of tourism research 7, 2, 63-77.
- Hjalager A.-M., 1996, *Agricultural Diversification into Tourism: Evidence of a European Community Development Program*, Tourism Management 17, 2, 103-111.
- Institute of Tourism, 2006, *Podróż Polaków w 2006 roku*, Podstawowe wyniki badań, www.intur.com.pl/inne/polacy2006.pdf (8/08).
- Institute of Tourism, 2007, *Kwatery agroturystyczne i pokoje gościnne 2007 – ewidencja według gmin*, www.msport.gov.pl/download/Turystyka/Statystyka/Kwatery_agroturystyczne_i_pokoje_goscinne_w_gminach_2007.xls (08/08).
- Institute of Tourism, 2008, *Trends and forecasts* www.intur.com.pl/itenglish/forecasts.htm (06/08)
- Jordan P., 2006, *Tourism and EU Enlargement: a Central European Perspective*, In: Hall D., Smith M., Marciszewska B. (eds.), *Tourism in the New Europe*, Wallingford, 65-80.
- Kozak M.W., 2006, *Rola agroturystyki w rozwoju obszarów wiejskich*, bip.minrol.gov.pl/FileRepozytory/FileRepozytoryShowImage.aspx?item_id=27327 (07/08).

- Lane B., 1994, *What is rural tourism*, Journal of Sustainable Tourism 2, 1-2, 7-21.
- Long P., Lane, B., 2000, *Rural Tourism Development*, In: Gartner W.C., Lime D.W. (eds.), *Trends in Outdoor Recreation, Leisure and Tourism*, Wallingford, 299-308.
- Long P.T., Nuckolls J.S., 1994, *Organising resources for rural tourism development: the importance of leadership, planning and technical assistance*. Tourism Recreation Research 19, 2, 19-34.
- Majewska J., 2008, *Local Government's Involvement in the Development of Entrepreneurship in emerging Tourism Destinations*, In: Gołembski G. (ed.), *Entrepreneurship and quality in tourism in light of Polish and international research*, Poznań, 127-145.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2005, *Rozwój agroturystyki na obszarach wiejskich*, Warsaw, Biuletyn informacyjny 7-8/2005, 11-18.
- Nowaczek A.M.K., Fennell D.A., 2002, *Ecotourism in post-communist Poland*, Tourism Geographies 4, 4, 372-395.
- Oppermann M., 1996, *Rural tourism in southern Germany*, Annals of Tourism Research 23, 1, 86-102.
- Paesler R., 1999, *Alternative Tourism in Germany – A Chance for the Incoming Tourism in East Central and Eastern Europe?* In: Wyrzykowski J. (ed.), *Alternative tourism as an important factor of incoming tourism development in Central and Eastern Europe*, Wrocław.
- Paesler R., 2007, *Der Wandel des Tourismus in den Transformationsländern Ostmittel- und Osteuropas durch die politische Wende*, In: Becker C., Hopfinger H., Steinecke A. (eds.), *Geographie der Freizeit und des Tourismus - Bilanz und Ausblick*, München, 555-567.
- Pils M., 2006, *New Trends, New Markets*, Workshop 3 Fact Sheet, 5th European Tourism Forum, 16.-17.11.2006, Cyprus. www.etfcyprus2006.com.cy/presentation/workshop3/factsheet.htm (08/08).
- Porter M.E., 1994, *The competitive advantage of nations*, Hampshire.
- Przezbórska L., 2003, *Relationships between rural tourism and agrarian restructuring in a transitional economy – The case of Poland*, In: Hall D., Roberts L., Mitchell M. (eds.), *New directions in rural tourism*, Aldershot, 205-222.
- Przezbórska L., 2005, *Przemiany gospodarstw agroturystycznych Wielkopolski w latach 1990-2003*, Roczniki Naukowe, 7, 1, 197-203.
- Raich F., 2006, *Governance räumlicher Wettbewerbseinheiten: ein Ansatz für die Tourismus-Destination*, Wiesbaden.
- Ribeiro M., Marques C., 2002, *Rural Tourism and the Development of Less Favoured Areas*, International journal of tourism research 4, 3, 211-220.
- Roberts L., Simpson F. 1999, *Developing Partnership Approaches to Tourism in Central and Eastern Europe*, Journal of Sustainable Tourism 7, 3, 314-330.
- Sharpley R., Vass A., 2006, *Tourism, farming and diversification: An attitudinal study*, Tourism Management 27, 5, 1040-1052.

- Sikorska D., 2007, *Agroturystyka i turystyka wiejska jako istotne elementy pozarolniczej działalności na obszarach wiejskich*, Roczniki Naukowe, Stowarzyszenie ekonomistów rolnictwa i agrobiznesu 9, 3, 181-183.
- Sikorska-Wolak I., 2006, *Tourism as a chance for rural development*, Electronic Journal of Polish Agricultural Universities 9, 4. www.ejpau.media.pl/volume9/issue4/art-02.html (08/08).
- Somorowska A., 2003, *Why it is worth investing in Polish tourism?* Presentation, 6. CEI Summit Economic Forum 19.-21.11.2003, www.ceinet.org/download/sef_2003/s5_Somorowska.ppt (08/08).
- Steinecke A., 2006, *Tourismus: eine geographische Einführung*, Braunschweig.
- Wilson S., Fesenmaier D.R., Fesenmaier J., Es J.C. van, 2001, *Factors for Success in Rural Tourism Development*, Journal of Travel Research 40, 2, 132-139.
- WTO World Tourism Organization 2004, *Rural Tourism in Europe: Experiences, Development and Perspectives*, No location given.
- Wyrzykowski J., 2000, *Conditions of Foreign Tourism Development in Central and Eastern Europe*, In: Wyrzykowski J. (ed.), *Changes in model of tourism in the last decade*, Wrocław, 93-112.
- Zarêbski M., 2006, *Motywy wyboru usług agroturystycznych*, Roczniki Naukowe, Stowarzyszenie ekonomistów rolnictwa i agrobiznesu 8, 4, 390-394.